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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE FIRST YEAR FOR FOUR ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

by

PAMELA D. WARREN

(C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled: THE FIRST YEAR FOR FOUR ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS submitted by Pamela D. Warren in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION.

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Date: October 2, 1989

DEDICATION

To Audrey and Ken

who believed that I could do it
and who supported me as I did

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover what it means to be a beginning principal by describing the impact of critical incidents on first year principals. Four elementary principals in a large urban area were interviewed three times over the course of a school year. In approximately three hours of semi-structured interviews, the respondents were encouraged to "tell their stories" about their experiences. Questions central to the study were: what did they expect would happen, what really happened, what were the differences between expectation and reality, and what did they learn?

Findings indicated that despite differences in background, sex, age, school, and skill, each of the respondents encountered surprises. Indeed, even the most "seasoned" veteran principals contacted throughout the study recalled vividly some of those first year surprises years later. In addition, each of the principals dealt with a barrage of critical incidents that caused them to examine what they "stood for." While these may have impeded the fulfilling of goals, essentially they caused them to develop a repertoire of solutions to problems, and to come to an understanding and definition of their role as a principal.

The study noted that the role clarification process of a principal is complex and very individualistic. Despite preparation programs, there was a gap between what principals expected, and the reality of their first experiences. The size of the gap varied, the smallest existing for the administrator with the most varied leadership experience, and a close link to another principal. Even though the four principals had been excellent teachers and had served in other leadership positions, they were essentially ill prepared for some aspects of their role. The rapid and sustained pace, the stress levels, the disappointments, the types of incidents teachers presented, and the expectations others had of them, caused aspects of their inaugural year to resemble a baptism of fire.

Recommendations suggested the need for identification and preservice programs for potential leadership candidates, for the "professionalization" and teaching of administration based on the needs of individuals, and for the strengthening of mentor and support systems for first year principals.

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Chapter 1

THE FIRST YEAR FOR FOUR ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

Introduction

Experiences of first year principals provide a unique introduction into the world of administration in schools. These experiences vary from gentle indoctrinations and socializations in some organizations, to "searing baptisms" in others. Some of the administrators who have had distressing beginnings would have wished otherwise. "Had I only known" became a reason for me to explore what it means to be a first year principal, in the hopes of providing a basis of understanding for academics and practitioners.

This study explored what it means to be a beginning principal. It focused on an aspect of the principal's preparation for administration - the actual experiences of first year administrators. It examined the impact of initial critical incidents on their understanding of the principalship, on how they sought to make sense of these incidents, and on how the first

year "happenings" influenced their goals, future actions, and their philosophies.

This chapter will describe the background to the problem to be considered, as well as its purpose, the significance of the problem, and the setting for the study. It also lists the assumptions, delimitations and definitions involved in the study.

Background to the Problem

I was appointed to a principalship after seven years as a classroom teacher. Before my first appointment, I knew that I was effective in dealing with students and parents, knowledgeable about curriculum and programs, flexible in dealing with problems, that I "managed" a classroom well, and that I had a positive working rapport with staff and administration. In addition, I was involved in community endeavors and school district committees. I thought of myself as a professional, and conducted myself in that manner, regularly attending inservice sessions, and working towards a second degree through night classes at the university in my community. It seemed logical that I would do well in my first year as a principal. What became obvious very quickly in my preparations for school opening that year, was that

very little about what I had done as an effective teacher prepared me for administration. Indeed, I came to the conclusion that teachers know very little about what exactly their principal does all day. I think effective teachers intuitively know the broader issues and realities being "juggled" in a principalship, but the specifics and the smaller details essentially elude them. It's these smaller issues that end a first year principal's "honeymoon."

The "honeymoon" in my new school ended about two hours after all the staff assembled for the first staff meeting. What unfolded afterward was a "baptism of fire" because I had not expected to have to deal with some of the issues and incidents I found thrust at me. I was essentially surprised by **what** I had to deal with, as well as by the rapid and constant flow of critical incidents that presented themselves to me. I wanted to accomplish so much in that first year, and I found myself buried instead under the day to day managing of a large school and a challenging staff. My inaugural year has subsequently impacted on my way of dealing with people and situations in a school. I now have a repertoire of solutions and problem solving techniques gathered "in the trenches under fire," as well as a set of expectations that may insulate my next "first" year experience from being such a surprise. Feelings of

regret about what "could have been" have dispersed as a result of working with first year principals and studying about administration. I was determined that others might not have to experience what I did - hence this study.

From informal discussions with colleagues about their first year experiences, I realized that the realities of that year went far beyond their expectations, and that these experiences were crystallized in incidents which these people used as anecdotes to illustrate how the situations both surprised and influenced them. As a result, in this study, I set out to find out about first year experiences, to describe the critical incidents, and discover the influences they had on principals as they clarified their role for themselves.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gather reports of events in the first year of a principalship, to discover what it means to be a beginning principal and to consider the impact of experiences or critical incidents in that year on the principals' goals, actions and understandings of their role. There was a particular focus on identifying differences between the

expectations of first year principals, and the realities of those beginning experiences. The study attempted to describe the uniqueness of the events in a first year in school administration, to capture positive as well as negative experiences, or critical incidents that took place, as well as to discover the impact of these on individual principals as they went through the process of understanding what was expected of them. In documenting information about what happened to four first year principals, I intended to gather the "wisdoms" that grow out of beginning experiences, that were useful to the participants during the process and possibly for a period of time beyond the actual research.

Statement of the Problem

The critical incidents in the first year of a principalship not only challenge the underlying value system of principals, but in dealing with these events, shape their actions, their decision making and their understandings of the principal's role. This in turn becomes the context for subsequent decision making and actions of the principal.

Specifically, the study focused on examining with principals the impact of critical incidents in order to gather answers to the following questions:

1. What did principals expect would happen in their first year? What did they expect to accomplish?

2. What really happened? What were the critical incidents?

3. What were the differences between expectation and reality?

4. What surprised them? What did they find themselves unprepared for?

5. What did they learn? What recommendations would they make?

Significance of the Problem

This study is worthwhile to the field of educational administration because it will help to document information that has largely been hidden. It will provide data from the actual work of beginning principals which could be used as a basis for further research. The process of gathering and analyzing the data will essentially be a way of capturing the "wisdom" that grows out of beginning experiences. In essence, the process will be a consciousness raising

experience. The information gathered will be useful to the participants in the following ways:

1. The process itself will serve as a means of catharsis for those whose first experiences might have been particularly "damaging" or negative.

2. It will create a pool of information for personal growth.

3. It will give the respondents opportunities to critically examine themselves, to reflect, to organize their thoughts, and to gain insight into their beliefs and administrative philosophy throughout their first year, and perhaps before (rather than during or after) situations requiring decisions confronted them.

In addition, the study will be useful for others, both during the process, and for a period of time beyond the actual research, in the following ways:

1. It will provide some "actual experience" data for the consideration of prospective administrators.

2. It may allow individuals to "see" themselves and subsequently examine issues or behaviours critically, so they may become more proactive in decision making.

3. It may give insight into necessary pre or post leadership appointment training programs.

4. It may allow individuals opportunity to confirm for themselves whether or not they really do want to be a principal.

The Setting

The four first year principals in the study worked in different regions of a large urban area. The administrative philosophy of the school district was one of decentralized decision making. An Associate Superintendent of Schools worked fairly closely with each new principal. All of the principals in the study were administrators in elementary schools. None of them had an assistant principal or a curriculum coordinator. I had worked briefly (in a consultant - teacher situation) with one of the principals previous to the study. I had briefly met one other. The other two were known to me in name only. Each new principal's school had special challenges. They had one or more of: rental organizations using the facility, special needs students and specialist staff in large numbers, second language programs, a high profile community, dwindling enrolments, underuse of the building space, outdated physical facilities, or challenging combinations of an "inherited" staff.

Assumptions

Major assumptions underlying this research were:

1. that there are critical incidents that must be dealt with in the first year of a principalship;

2. that the process of dealing with these events has an impact on the principal, and this impact differs from individual to individual;

3. that encountering critical incidents has influenced subsequent principal behaviour; and

4. that the "real" learning about a principalship happens on the job.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited to a small number of beginning elementary school principals in one school district. It was limited by the fact that there were three interviews with each informant. Further, while the study took place over the course of a year, information gathered may not take into account the perceptive abilities or memories of individual informants. The first interview ought to have taken place before the beginning of the first school term rather than during it. Additional limitations arise from my ability to conduct interviews, to gather and

analyze data, and to establish a relationship of trust with informants.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, a first year principal is one who has had no previous experience as a principal.

Rist (1982) defined critical incidents as those that "challenge or reinforce the fundamental beliefs, practices, and values of an organization" (p. 446). For the purpose of this study, critical incidents are those that challenge or reinforce the fundamental beliefs, practices or values of the individual principal. This was the definition used in discussions to clarify the meaning of the term critical incident. It was given to the principals only after they had opportunity to express their own understanding of the term. All the principals used an interpretation of critical incident similar to Rist's definition.

Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter 1 the problem was identified, its background stated, and the purpose, significance and setting for the study were described. The questions

being asked in the study were stated. Chapter 2 contains a review of the current literature that forms the context for the study. In addition it states the conceptual framework for the study. The methodology used to conduct the study will be described in the 3rd Chapter. In the 4th Chapter, the findings of the study are presented. In Chapter 5, the conclusion, reflections and recommendations are listed.

Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In spite of personal memories or associations, few who are not principals, have an understanding of what it means to be a principal. Even fewer know what principals actually do. This study is an attempt to understand the work of the principal, specifically that of a beginning principal, and the literature review is an attempt to set the context for this understanding.

The role of the principal is complex, evolving, and changing in its emphasis. Many and varied circumstances contribute to this change in emphasis in a principal's role. Hay (1980) cited the major factors of this change as:

> the new social climate, the demands of more complex school programs, accountability and staff supervision, regionalization of school governance, collective agreement contracts, and the militancy of the teachers' professional organizations. (p. 28)

Weindling and Earley (1987) described administration in the 80's as significantly different from that of the 60's or even the 70's. They cited declining enrolments, changes in legislation, an

increase in parental involvement, a rise in the influence of teacher unions, and an increase in complexity and accountability of the principalship as factors in the change of focus for administrators in schools.

What follows is a review of current literature that formed a context for this study about the first year as a principal. There has been a focus on studies that deal with actual experiences of principals, or descriptions about what principals do from the more recent writers in the field. In addition to other first year experiences, there will be a particular focus on recent major thrusts about the principalship that serve to clarify what happens to beginning principals. The literature review focuses on these: roles, culture, vision, and values and leadership.

The Role of the Principal

There is an extensive information telling principals what they ought to do and how they ought to do it, written over a long period of time by many distinguished authors and researchers. This portion of the review is not a presentation of the long history of research about the role a principal ought to perform, or about the administrative skills and practices that

have been theorized. It is intended to take the reader to an understanding of the more recent work that impacts on, or helps us understand, the actual experiences of beginning principals. This literature represents the data that first year principals may have gleaned in formal or informal study. Such data gave them a sense of what was expected of them, and what their work would be like.

One of the first references to the realities of the principalship was Wolcott's (1973) study, The Man in the Principal's Office. Although Wolcott's ethnographic study was conducted more than 15 years ago in the United States, he focused on the day to day work of a veteran principal. He captured the actual day to day experiences of a principal, his formal and informal encounters, his socialization processes, the many roles he played, and the many "masks" he wore.

Mintzberg (1973) described the interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles that administrators must fulfill. He characterized administrative work as unrelenting, fast paced, brief, fragmentary and often superficial with administrators demonstrating a preference for live action and oral communication in face-to-face encounters.

Since then, more recent data has been presented by other authors and researchers. Moylan (1988), in her

study of an elementary principal based on Wolcott's earlier study, attempted to make discoveries about the day to day work of an administrator. Moylan's "Evelyn" demonstrated several roles embedded in her actions as principal. Evelyn was an:

> enabler, empathizer, challenger, advocate, collaborator, image maker, loyalist, tactician.... the overarching quality which permeated all eight characteristics of performance was that of a teacher. (p. v)

Moylan saw Evelyn as a teacher in almost everything she did in her school. She was a strong advocate for all the people in her organization, and she capitalized on the "teachable moments" as she went about her day to day work.

Robinson (1985) analyzed and described the results of research about effective schools. His account of fundamental factors common to effective schools, revealed that there was no single factor to explain school success, but that effective principals were a central factor in this success. He said that effective schools had leaders who demonstrated knowledge, skills or attitudes in the following areas:

> assertive instructional role
> goal and task oriented
> well organized
> conveyed high expectations for students and staff
> policies well defined and communicated
> frequent classroom visits
> high visibility and availability to students and staff
> strong support to teaching staff

adept parent and community relations (p. 8)

On the basis of interviews with Ontario principals from rural, urban, elementary and secondary schools, Hay (1980) wrote about principals' roles, but his focus was on the change that the last twenty years have imposed. In addition to Mintzberg's roles, Hay concluded that the role of competent principals in the 80's needed to include:

> the ability to manage, skill in human relations, knowledge in setting objectives for curriculum development, skill in supervision and evaluation of program and personnel, and an understanding of legal rights and responsibilities. (p. 27)

Descriptive studies like the work of Martin and Willower (1981), gave further insight into the role of the principal, and his or her duties. Martin and Willower observed the work of five high school principals over a twenty-five day period. Their results indicate that principals spent approximately seventy percent of their time engaged in scheduled and unscheduled meetings, desk work, and exchanges with people. This on site data gave further credibility to the roles principals had to fill. Their observations suggest that the role of the principal ought to include skill in organizing, communicating and dealing with people.

Montgomerie, McIntosh and Mattson (1987) in their study of principals' roles wrote about this role as

being "defined by complexity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and change" (p. 408). They quote the work of Manasse (1985), who summarized recent research about the role of the principal from descriptive studies. She defined the role of a principal based on the nature of their administrative work:

> (1) a low number of self-initiated tasks, (2) many activities of short duration, (3) discontinuity caused by interruptions, (4) the superseding of prior plans by the needs of others in the organization, (5) face-to-face verbal contacts with one other person, (6) variability of tasks, (7) an extensive network of individuals and groups, (8) a hectic and unpredictable flow of work, (9) numerous unimportant decisions and trivial agendas, (10) few attempts at written communication, (11) interactions [predominantly] with subordinates, (12) a preference for problems and information that are specific (rather than general), concrete, solvable, and currently pressing. (p. 408)

Dwyer (1984) wrote about the work of successful principals in his description of a project by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. In this study, forty-two successful principals were nominated by their peers for observation. At the end of "hundreds of hours" (p. 32) of observations and interactions with seventeen of these principals, Dwyer concluded that effective leadership had "no single vision," (p. 33) and that there was no "simple formula for success" (p. 33). He characterized a principal's role as one filled with routines and subtleties.

William Greenfield (1986) also described the day to day work of principals. In his report on Frances Hedges, as observed by the Far West Laboratory Research team, he referred to Frances as a "culture builder and reinforcer" (p. 130). He noted that what principals ought to be doing is described at great length in the literature. He added, however, that these "ought to's" lack meaning or understanding without first considering the context for those roles and actions. He referred to concepts like "instructional leadership, management and administration" as "ambiguous" (p. 131) and although

> useful fictions fueling the arguments of those who would prescribe what school principals should be doing, they do not adequately describe what principals actually do, nor do they help one decipher the meaning of those actions in a given context. (p. 131)

Similarly, in his approach to studying the principalship, Sergiovanni (1987) stated that it was not enough to study theories and concepts about school administration, but that

> theoretical knowledge must be interpreted in light of the specific contexts and situations within which the principals work if it is to be used effectively. (p. 3)

These studies reinforce that principals need extensive interpersonal skills because of the nature of their work. Principal's work is portrayed as essentially people oriented. It takes place in a

fragmented, ad hoc basis, and it is more recently viewed as content specific.

Culture

Greenfield (1986) used the concept organizational culture to make sense of the actions in a typical day of Principal Hedges. He quoted Schien (1985) who described culture as coming from

> (a) what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control; (b) leader reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises; (c) deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching by leaders; (d) criteria for allocation of reward and status; [and] (e) criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement, and excommunication. (p. 134)

He saw culture as having social and moral aspects. This led him to analyze the role and work of the principal in these contexts. He discussed what he called "persistent dilemmas of the principalship" (p. 141). These dilemmas revealed the "hidden world of school principals" (p. 141). Some of the dilemmas Frances Hedges faced were:

> the pressure to settle disputes that have not been witnessed first hand; the pressure to remain calm and in control in the face of daily threats to stability; the pressure to act despite competing and often conflicting standards of goodness; the pressure to move forward with an agenda despite continuous and unpredictable interruption; and the pressure to stay on top of a situation that's in constant flux. (p. 142)

Greenfield described dimensions of principal's work as variable from one place to another based on the differences in school communities and cultures. In comparing the work of Frances Hedges to other principals, he noted that there were

> important features of the work situation that appear constant from one school to another. These similarities concern moral, social and technical role-demands associated with the school work situation itself. These are noted because they appear to be central to understanding the work of school principals, and to understanding why some principals and some schools are more effective than others. These role demands are a function of the work situation itself and vary in their importance and intensity from one to another. (p. 137)

In analyzing his data he explored "the usefulness of viewing the work of school principals through a cultural lense" (p. 147) and he saw this as "point(ing) to the importance of social, moral and technical role-demands associated with the nature of the work-setting" (p. 147). The multifaceted role demands and the cultural setting were seen as crucial to understanding the "new" role of principals according to Greenfield.

In discussing excellence in schools, Sergiovanni (1984) also stressed the importance of the culture of the school. He viewed the role of a principal as being divided into five categories: the technical leader, the human leader, the educational leader, the symbolic

leader, and the cultural leader, and he theorized that while the technical, human and educational leadership characteristics were essential to competent schooling, on their own, these factors would not lead to excellence. The cultural and symbolic leadership forces by comparison, were essential to "excellence in schooling" (p. 8).

The school as a culture has received increasing emphasis from these writers who stress as Greenfield (1986) did, that it is the context for the "moral, social, and technical" (p. 130) role demands.

Vision

Manasse (1986) emphasized the role of vision in giving "life to an organization," (p.150) and the "force which moulds meaning for the people of an organization" (p. 150). The ability to see possibilities for an organization, and to invite its members to share that vision were central to putting a vision in place.

In addition, Sergiovanni (1984) used the phrase purposing to clarify his meaning about the behaviour of a "symbolic" principal. He defined purposing as:

> that continuous stream of actions by an organization's formal leader which has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment

> regarding the organization's basic purposes. (p. 6)

He referred to the importance of "mindscapes" for principals to continue to learn, grow, and change. His mindscapes were seen as:

> implicit mental images and frameworks through which administrative and schooling reality and one's place within these realities is envisioned. They are intellectual and psychological images of the real world of schooling and of the boundaries and parameters of rationality that help us to make sense of this world. In a very special way, mindscapes are intellectual security blankets, on the one hand, and road maps through an uncertain road on the other. (1987, p. xi)

Miskel (1982) described goal and system resources that would help identify as well as measure effectiveness in schools. He reported the role that goal setting had on the school, and the role of the principal in this process as the central figure in establishing and achieving goals.

Rehihan and Renihan (1984) explored the connection between effective administration and the image of the organization. Key factors to them were the principal's role in "nurturing of organizational image through 'cosmetic care' and 'pastoral care' " (p. 1). They described the factors associated with school effectiveness, some of the barriers to achieving it, and some of the solutions for nurturing it. Factors associated with school effectiveness were seen as: leadership, concious attention to climate, academic

focus, great expectations, a sense of mission, positive motivational strategies, and feedback on academic performance (pp. 1-2). Barriers to effective administration were described as: "group think and the seduction of technology", power games, territorialism, tradition, and poor leadership (p.3-4). Developing an "ongoing pastoral care" and a "we philosophy" (p. 5) were viewed as possible solutions for barriers of school effectiveness.

Riffel (1988) talked of the role of morality, vision, and development in leadership. He described leadership as "emergent," "developmental," and "vision in action" (p. 23).

These authors have expressed a new set of administrative vocabulary not used in the 60's or 70's. Words like mission, goal, image, all served to embody the visionary aspects of the role of the principal, seemingly a necessary component for effective leadership in the 80's.

Values and Leadership

Recent literature describes the role of values as part of the process of clarifying a principal's role. Sergiovanni (1987) said of a base for principals' work: "how principals think about schooling, the curriculum,

teaching and learning influences how they act" (p. 104). Ethics, values, and philosophy seemed to be viewed as a fundamental starting place for principals, but perhaps even more so for the new administrator. If we believe this to be true, then the preparation for a first principalship must take into account the need for individuals to discover for themselves, or reflect upon what they think about these fundamentals before they are called to act in the day to day operation of their schools.

McGregor (1970) wrote about the impact of philosophical belief systems and the assumptions principals take to their schools. His work examined the role of expectation, and the traditional views of control and influence in the principalship. "Theory X" and "Theory Y" offered insights to principals in terms of the assumptions and generalizations they possess, and the subsequent attitudes towards people in their schools. These assumptions of their role as principals are key factors for effective leadership in the sense that principals need to acknowledge their biases, their beliefs about influence and control, indeed their philosophy about people, in order to understand their decision making and day to day prioritizing of problems.

Jacobson, Logsdon and Weigman (1973) expanded on the role of values as a key to effective administration. They wrote about the inadequacy of preservice training, stated that principals saw themselves in terms of "old styles" of management, and suggested that they lacked strategies and knowledge in dealing with people problems and change.

Hodgkinson (1978) described administration as value laden and pointed out that each principal's set of values, has to "be reconciled with his special nomothetic commitment to the organizational values" (p. 130). He further described the role of values:

> Values in administration refer not simply to the individual person of the administrator, nor even to his extended ego in the form of family, clan, or interest clique, but to the nomothetic collectivity of the organization. (p. 123)

Hodgkinson suggested that an avoidance of value analysis and reflection would lead a principal to:

> retreat to managerialism, resort to bureaucratic rationality and impersonality, and relapse into scepticism or positivism....Administrators need a technique for resolving value conflicts which is superior to the methods of avoidance, least resistance, or lowest principle. (p. 146)

Knowledge of one's own philosophy was Hodgkinson's key to finding this technique and to providing a base for reflection.

Sergiovanni's (1982, 1984) work on excellence in schools is based on the role of values as part of

leadership. His foundation of administration is moral decisions. Sergiovanni (1982) described what he called new leadership values for the principalship and the significant change in the way leadership in schools is viewed. He presented a theory that values such as "efficiency, specificity, rationality, measurability, and objectivity combined with beliefs that good management is tough minded" (p. 330) be replaced with the "holistic values of purpose, goodness, and importance" (p. 330).

Sergiovanni (1987) described the role of the principal indicating an emphasis on leadership and administration.

> Successful leadership and administration within the principalship is directed toward the improvement of teaching and learning for students. Though assuming an active role in this improvement, the principal needs to give equal attention to **enabling others** to function more effectively on behalf of the school. In a sense, the principal, besides engaging in leadership intents and behaviors, **empowers others** to **be leaders**. One rarely finds an effective school without an effective principal. By the same token, rarely does the principal accomplish much without empowering others to act [emphasis in the original]. (p. 7)

Perhaps most importantly, he took a "reflective practice approach" to the principalship.

> Reflective practice relies heavily on findings and principles that emerge from theory and research in education and related social sciences and from careful study of the specific context of schooling that a principal faces. It does not seek to establish a "one best way" for all principals to

> practice or a "one best way" to account for all situations. Instead, it seeks to use knowledge from many sources to inform the intuitions of principals so that the decisions they make about practice are sound and effective for the unique situations and problems that they face. (p. 67)

In his reflective thinking approach, he viewed the work of a principal as individual and unique, as opposed to simply dealing with standard problems using a set of standardized solutions.

The importance of reflection as an aid to learning from experience was also demonstrated by Jentz and Wofford (1979). They presented a series of fairly in-depth case studies over a long period of time to demonstrate how leaders learned, through personal change, in situations of conflict. Their study showed that principals, through reflective study were able to enhance their own personal learning and become more effective.

Sergiovanni (1987) described the work of a principal:

> in reality, the task of the principal is to make sense of messy situations by increasing understanding and discovering and communicating meaning. (p. xiii)

In a recent professional development session, Dr. Sergiovanni (1989) spent time expanding on his belief and commitment about "empowering" and "enabling" the people in his organization. He saw this commitment as a covenant, and saw the principal as "ministering" to

the needs of his or her organization in a spiritual and moral sense and suggested that greater acceptance of this view would ensure effective leadership. Commenting on his philosophy towards a principalship, he said that administration contained the word "minister," and that that ought to be the focus for leaders in schools.

The moral and ethical implications about the work of a principal has received more emphasis in recent research. More writers are seeing leadership as embedded in a philosophy of education and administration. Part of a beginning principal's role clarification seems then to be a personal identification of both philosophies. In this context, the writers stressed that conflicts were not easily resolved, and that a "set" of easy answers to problems did not exist.

Other First Year Experiences

The first year as a principal also began to receive more emphasis in the research literature. The following studies document our present knowledge and understanding in this area.

In examining the work of new principals, Daresh (1986, 1987) reviewed some of the major problems and

issues in early principal work and identified implications for preservice and inservice programs. His data were gathered through intensive interviews with twelve American first and second year principals. He referred to their feelings of "being swamped" by their work and of having to handle it all on their own. He found role clarification, technical expertise and socialization problems key factors in the "being swamped" feelings. Daresh also related that the principals in his study said that they had doubts about themselves, and what they were really doing.

His investigations of first years in principalships resulted in his descriptions of three categories of concern that have implications for training programs to help new principals adjust to their new role. He found that they have difficulty with technical, mechanical or procedural expertise, problems with interpersonal skills, and a lack of "socialization to the profession and the system" (p. 170). He made suggestions as to how to increase opportunities for beginning principals to learn more about their jobs, and to

> reduce the feelings of isolation, anxiety, and the ineffectiveness so often described by those in their first jobs. (p. 173)

The role clarification process seemed to be a significant part of the work of first year principals.

Role clarification not only came from what principals took to the organization in the way of skill, what principals and others expected of them, but also from their "on the job" experiences. Daresh (1986) discovered in interviewing beginning principals:

> Very few people entering the field of school administration ever stop to question themselves as to what it really means to be a leader, and how to manage the increased power and formal authority that automatically accompany the title of principal. (p. 169)

As principals went about their work in their first year, the day to day interactions with people and incidents impacted on the clarification and understanding of what was expected of them. Daresh (1986) found:

> One of the specific deficiencies related to role clarification described by several of the beginning principals dealt with the extent to which first and second year administrators believed in, or felt comfortable with, the authority and leadership role that had been assigned to them. What many seemed to be saying was that it was nice to be called "the boss", but nobody could imagine the responsibility associated with the title until living the role. (p. 169)

Earley and Weindling (1987) also recently examined the first years of principalship. Their work in Britain, gathered data that detailed how "heads" got their positions, the demographics and backgrounds of candidates, the impact on already existing organizations, leadership styles, the change process

itself, and relationships with external forces. Their conclusions focused on recommending a series of "efforts" to prepare leadership candidates, and included

> efforts to improve preparation for headship should be concentrated on aspiring deputy heads.... providers should tailor their senior management courses more carefully to the needs of LEA's, heads and deputies....new heads should fully recognize the importance of their relationships with the senior management team....new heads should concentrate much of their effort in establishing good working relationships with the staff....new heads need to learn more about the management of change....LEA's should have a planned programme of induction for new heads.... LEA's need to consider ways of improving their support for heads.... (pp. 184 to 192).

William Greenfield (1986) speculated that first year experiences were a repeated entity. Not only did rookie principals go through a painful adjustment period in their first assignment, but principals new to an organization also encountered similar inaugurations. In talking about the typical day to day activities of principal Frances Hedges, he described:

> much of what principals do falls outside of the bounds of technical rationality, and that there are important dimensions of their work that cannot be reduced to technique. (p. 130)

A recent study of beginning principals in Florida by the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Florida (1989) explored the characteristics and professional backgrounds of first time high school principals, and their cultural

orientations and sources of support during selection and entry. The Beginning Principal Study gathered data from on-site observations and interviews, telephone interviews, and surveys of first year principals to document and describe the "experiences, challenges, and keys to success common to the first-year principal" (p. 3).

Their investigations revealed that the typical beginning high school principal in their study was

> a white male, about 40 years old, and assigned to a rural, Midwestern school district within which he had taught for nearly ten years. He had been promoted after about four year's experience as assistant principal. This principal also had a master's degree or higher and had worked in the same district but at a different school than the one to which he was eventually assigned as principal. (p. 7)

In their work with beginning high school principals they found

> significant differences among principals that are related to three demographic variables: size of school, school location, and prior experience as an assistant principal (p. 12).

They discovered that principals were confronted by challenges that kept them from pursuing their "mission," that of attaining the goals they had set for themselves and their school.

> While many principals have many concerns related to time management and dealing with "internal" and "external" issues, their greatest concern is realizing their educational goals. (p. 12)

Keys to success were described in the methods used to support new principals toward "their pursuit of educational goals" (p. 13). They suggested that there was a need for support programs for beginning principals to provide for internship experiences, skill-development workshops, and "knowledge and skills necessary to work with key individuals and organizations beyond the school walls" (p. 13).

As part of the Beginning Principal Study, Roberts (1989) concentrated on the cultural orientations of first year principals. Roberts found that beginning principals "displayed weak cultural orientations and achievements in the areas of cultural linkages, loose and tight coupling, and leadership values" (p. 13).

Parkay and Currie (1989) also associated with the Beginning Principal Study, researched the sources of support for first year high school principals. They discovered that district level support came in the form of "reassurances about professional competence" and in "technical expertise to solve problems" (p. 8). Peer support, both formal and informal was seen as very important for beginning principals. Support of the teaching staff was viewed as "critical". Support of assistant principals gave first year principals the feeling that they were not alone. Parents, family and community and student support were seen as important

and positive. Parkay and Currie concluded that the first year in a principalship is a critical one and that principals are in great need of support from a variety of sources. To provide support they recommended workshops, creation of networks and counselling for beginning principals.

In collaboration with researchers at the University of Florida, Roberts and Wright (1989) studied, over a two year period, change efforts among first year principals as part of the Beginning Principals Study at the University of Colorado. Their work focused on the change efforts beginning principals made at the beginning of their first year, changes made as the year progressed, and on how they brought closure to the year and linked to plans for the subsequent school year. Their study revealed that in the early stages of a first year, new principals concentrated on student management, school climate, and instruction. They found that the first year principals waited to make changes because of the need to deliberate, "directives from superiors to go slowly," (p. 7) the timing of their hiring, or lack of time or a perception of no need for change. In the later stages of the school year the principals focused on management and climate to do more with the support of the organization. They found that planning was "weak and

unfocused, and visions (especially related to instruction) were not achieved" (p. i).

In their study of change efforts among first year high school principals, Roberts and Wright (1989) not only made discoveries about the complexity of the change process, but they came to conclusions about the nature of a principal's day.

> Given the complexities of change and the nature of how principals spend their day, it is apparent that (1) principals do not have large amounts of time to attend to thinking about strategic planning for change, (2) the time they have to plan and implement change is fragmented, (3) to a great extent their change efforts are frustrated by the simultaneous need to attend to a myriad of tasks. (p. 3)

The studies of first year principals emphasize the importance of knowing one's own philosophy of administration and vision for education, as well as having technical skills and an understanding of what is expected in the role of principal. In particular, some researchers stressed the need for support and assistance to overcome the feelings of isolation and inadequacy common to a new position.

Summary

The literature presented many models upon which principals, in particular beginning principals, might wish to base their administrative work. Indeed,

research about skills and practices, effective principals and effective schools might even masquerade as "recipes for success" to the inexperienced principal. In addition, the literature has presented an increasingly complex view of the role of the principal today, so much so that "recipes" no longer apply to specific situations. What principals expect of themselves in addition to what a multitude of others expect of them is dizzying. Skills and competencies that principals must now demonstrate hover close to an overwhelming catalogue of years of experience and wisdom. Values based leadership seems to be more and more accepted as a necessary prerequisite for administrative work in schools. On top of all of this, the literature also included a myriad of models that comes from the actual experiences of individual principals.

Sergiovanni (1982, 1984, 1987, 1989), Greenfield (1983, 1985, 1986), and Hodgkinson (1978) have helped to make sense of the large body of literature available. Sergiovanni's hierarchy of leadership forces has integrated the essence of many researchers and theorists. His descriptors of technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural leadership forces, clarified many issues presented in the literature and his "covenant" and "ministering" based value system has

given direction. Further, his work on reflective practice seems an essential aspect of survival in a principalship.

Greenfield's emphasis on viewing the work of a principal through a cultural and contextual lense has also given a focus to a large portion of the literature. Essentially, we must consider the context for people and situations in order to make meaning from incidents involving them. Hodgkinson's belief that administration is value laden suggests that value analysis and reflection truly lead principals to a better understanding of what is expected of them and what their actions ought to be.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study is an attempt to reflect the findings of the literature on beginning principal's experiences, to document those aspects which researchers had found to be critical, and to use them as guides to possible areas for discussion with the principal's in the study. The framework then, provided possible directions for the interviews, but discussion was not limited to those areas.

There are both prescriptions about what ought to be in place in administrative work in schools: the

skills, competencies, tasks and practices as well as the information about the role of effective principals in effective schools. There are also descriptions of principals at work in case studies, in ethnographic studies and in other interpretive or descriptive studies. Both manage to capture essences of principals at work and both offer insights for beginning principals, however, they have limited value unless beginning principals consider two other sources of data. The first is their own attributes, the knowledge, skills, attitudes, prior experiences, and personal values (as evidenced by their actions) that they take to their position. The second is their experiences as a principal. Only through reflection about incidents, and consideration of where those incidents "fit" for the individual in that specific context will situations make sense for a beginning principal. This study examined the experiences of beginning principals, to describe how they came to an understanding of what "being a principal" means and to identify those experiences which helped shape their meanings.

Learning to be a principal in a sense is a repeating cycle, a vortex, or perhaps more appropriately a spiral, that deepens as the principal gets into it, of: personal values, day to day

experiences and reflecting on the "meshing" of both. New principals begin with what they take to their position, their values, their beliefs, and knowledge, skills and attitudes gathered over the process of their past experiences and learning. Add to these attributes, experiences that they encounter in the first weeks of their first principalship. Finally, add the process of reflection about incidents, events and situations as they are occurring, the valuing of situations, and ultimately, the learning from them. Only then do the prescriptions about what ought to be in place, and the descriptions of effective administrative practices have greater meaning.

The process of learning to be a principal hence involves four "sets" of input: what the principal takes to his or her position, what the principal does in the position, what research tells them they "ought" to do, and examples of administrative action from the work of others. The literature revealed few predictions about individual principalships, and no "tested, tried, and true" remedies for administrative problems. Leadership, it would seem is therefore, a very personal construction. The diagram that follows in Figure 1 may help to illustrate the conceptual framework for the study.

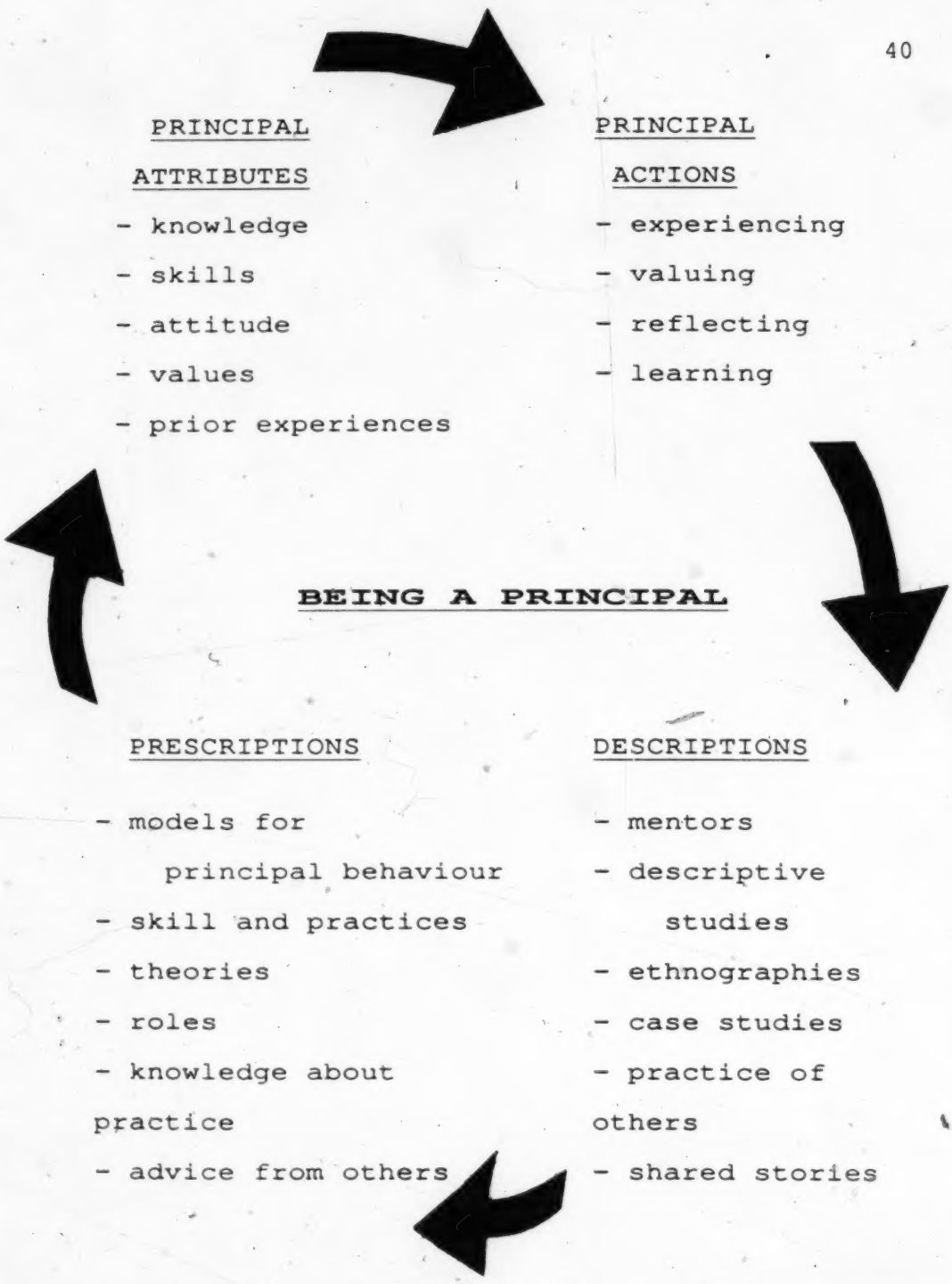

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Hodgkinson (1978) referred to administration as a "perpetual becoming, a journey in which the destination is never reached" (p. 125). Perhaps it's not so much that a destination be reached, but the quality of the journey that must be considered. Having said this, the focus of this study was one of the parts of the model presented, "the journey," in particular the first journey as a principal, the experiences of beginning principals. The methodology used to make discoveries about the experiences of four journeys will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

THE METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study sought to discover and disclose beginning principals' experiences, and to describe their impact on four new principals. Details about the methods used in conducting the study are described in this chapter.

Research Design

This study is based on the interpretive paradigm. tHrough the use of the naturalistic method of inquiry, the study has attempted to search for understandings from the incidents experienced by first year principals. It will not make comparisons or draw conclusions. In an effort to preserve the uniqueness of the individual situations, other than to discuss themes discovered in the data, there will be no generalizations made. Interviews were conducted to document the critical incidents of first year principals. Principals were asked to tell their

"stories," to describe incidents, thoughts, or events in their words. Through critical reflection with the informants, insights have been sought as to the effects of these incidents on the principals.

Data Sources

Out of a list of approximately ten possible informants, four first year principals were chosen. This group included a balance of males and females, a variety of background experiences and of appointment histories. Two of the principals came through the traditional route of teacher, assistant principal and then principal. They described themselves as effective and well liked teachers, who had positive experiences in past assignments. Two had a background that differed in that they had spent some time in consulting services, and/or central office positions before going to a principalship. Two were married with a family. Two were single. Two had waited what they termed a "long time" for their appointment, one was totally surprised when it happened, the fourth described a principalship as one of the options open at the time of appointment. All four of them expressed a willingness to take part in the study, without hesitation. All

were principals of elementary schools in a large urban area.

Explaining the Purpose and Nature of the Research to the Participants

Informants were given information about the purpose and procedures of the study by telephone. Once they expressed interest, they were asked if they would be willing to take part in the study. Subsequently, informants were given information in writing that further explained the purpose and nature of the study. A letter to each described the intent of the study, the format to be followed in gathering data, the benefits to themselves and perhaps others, and the guarantees about confidentiality and anonymity. Only after these steps had been followed were the first interview sessions arranged with each informant.

Obtaining Informed Consent of the Participants

The purpose of the study, the format for gathering data, information about expectations and time commitments involved were made clear to the informants at the outset. This was given verbally and then confirmed in writing to each of the participants. Consent of the informants was sought initially,

confirmed after each informant had received the letter detailing the study, and confirmed again at the time of arranging for the first interview session. At the third interview session this was again repeated, and recorded on tape. Throughout the entire process there was opportunity to ask questions, and obtain clarification about any part of the study. Principals were told that they could choose to opt out of the study at any time.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and that the confidentiality of people, places, and situations discussed in the interviews would be guaranteed. The letter sent to the informants indicated that individuals or schools would not be identified, and that there would be every attempt to remove data that could identify specific situations. This was restated at each interview. Where necessary, representative rather than unique data have been used. Situations and events that have been quoted or referenced have been sufficiently generalized so as not to identify specific schools, events, or people. Assurances were given that information shared about people and situations would be kept confidential. The

participants had an opportunity to agree about the data in transcripts and in the first draft of Chapter 4 before any information related to them was included in the thesis. At no time were principals compelled to respond to specific questions. Instead, they received repeated assurances that their participation was voluntary, that they could opt out at any time, and that information shared would be only that which they chose to discuss.

Pilot Study

To ensure that the interview questions were appropriate and usable, to give me experience in interviewing, to enhance my questioning skills, and to practice transcribing, an interview was conducted with a principal known to me. Once this was completed and discussed with my advisor, an observation and interview were planned and then conducted with a principal not known to me. I observed the principal for approximately two hours, and then had opportunity to ask questions and discuss my observations with her. Both principals had considerable experience, and were willing to take part in the pilot study. They offered insights in planning the data gathering interviews and they also confirmed the problem statement of the study.

Data Collection

Data were gathered in a series of three taped interviews. The four selected principals were interviewed three times each between November and May in one school year. Interviews were taped to facilitate transcribing of the data. The three meetings with informants were a combination of question asking and conversation, encouraging informants to "tell their story" and of reflecting about and analyzing incidents. In this sense the principals became co-researchers. Some specific questions were asked but generally each interview session encouraged talk about critical incidents in their administrative work. Reflection was encouraged so as to allow informants some "think time" about the impact of these critical incidents on themselves, on what was expected of them, and on their subsequent action.

Generally, the interviews themselves were approximately an hour in length, although more time was spent with each principal before and after the interview, in addition to contact with them during telephone conversations that occurred between sessions. The interviews took place during or at the end of the school day depending on the wishes and schedules of the informants. Each interview was semi-structured. There

was a "set" of questions to use as a structure for the overall interview, but the information gathered, and the probes within categories, and even the order of discussion differed. The direction of the questioning, and the interpretion of questions also differed from individual to individual. Rapport was established quickly with the informants. Each seemed to view the process as helpful to them, and ultimately helpful to someone else. There was never a sense of their time being wasted. They spoke freely, occasionally clarifying how data might be used or referred to in the study. Issues of research ethics were repeated and reconfirmed at each interview, and were recorded on tape at the occasion of the last interview.

Interview One

The first interview which collected information about the principals (how they became one, what were their plans for themselves), and their goals and expectations for their inaugural year, took place at the end of the first term of the school year (November and December). Before the interview began, informants were reassured that there would be no evaluative role to be played in the study from my point of view. It was to be an information gathering process instead. It was further stated that the process of critically

analyzing their own actions would be as useful to them as they wished it to be. They were encouraged to use me as a sounding board, and to discuss openly any incidents they felt comfortable about so doing. I asked that they not reveal the names of people in their organization, or that they change them in telling about critical incidents so as not to bias the stories for me, and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. I then checked to see if they had questions about anything described in a letter previously sent to each informant, about the procedures to be followed, or about the study in general. (The letter described the study and gave details about the principals' involvement in it.) The procedures to be followed were restated "for the record." I then expressed cautions about oral language in transcripts, and we confirmed that the tape recorder was functioning. Once the informants gave their consent, the first interview began.

There was some congruence about specific questions from person to person, but generally the interviews followed the lead of the flow of conversation, and of the issues raised by the informants. The interviewer began with some "safe" information gathering to establish some rapport with the informants and some "comfort zone" about the interview process. The first

data collected had to do with: the background, personal strengths, the "story of the appointment" of each informant, and descriptors about the school and its community. I asked for a name for each respondent as well as one for their school in case I needed to refer to an individual or school in the presentation of the data or in the analysis. The next set of questions attempted to get at the very first reactions or thoughts of the principal, as they heard about their leadership appointment. In asking questions such as "What was your first reaction when you heard about your new position? What were your first thoughts?", I was looking for some indication of the degree of preparedness for their new role. In asking about their first experiences, I intended to get information about the setting for the principal's new role. Questions like: "How were you greeted? How did teachers view you? What was the tone or feeling of the school?" revealed this context.

In asking whether they had had a "honeymoon," and whether they were still on it, I collected some information about the stressfulness of their early experiences. Questions about support systems, whom to call when they did not know what to do, or when they wanted to test an idea or a reaction to a problem, gave an indication of their awareness of daily routines in

their principalship and of their day to day problem solving strategies. Near the end of the interview, I asked if they had encountered any surprises, or if they had had to deal with anything they had not expected, or anything for which they felt unprepared.

Critical incidents were then discussed to arrive at a definition for individual principals. We did this together if there was no immediate response from the principal. I asked them to tell me about an incident they might consider to be a critical one. I deliberately asked this as an open ended question, because I was interested not only in the content of the incidents, but the categories they deemed to be critical, and their own definition of what constituted "critical."

Generally, from this point on the respondents did the majority of the talking, with just the odd probe or question for clarification from me. At the end of the interview each principal was asked to describe a typical day. I was trying to feel whether or not there was a match between the goals they had earlier expressed and the daily prioritizing they demonstrated by their actions. After summarizing the highlights, the interview concluded with reassurances that the transcripts would shortly be sent to the principals for their perusal.

Interview Two

The second interviews were scheduled to happen in the second school term. All of them took place at the end of February. This interview was intended to link to the first session, to pick up where it had left off, to seek more detail about some incidents, to find out about new critical incidents, and to continue to gather impressions as to how events were unfolding. Joint reflection and critical analysis of those events and the impact on the organization and themselves continued. Again the interview was semi-structured, but the individuality of each principal's situation took over much more so than during the first interview. Again there were similar sections or agenda items in the semi-structure of this interview, but much less overall similarity than in the first meeting with the principals.

The first portion of the interview was a summary of the highlights of the previous session. After confirming that these were the highlights the principal had earlier communicated, I asked about the progress towards goals. The continued importance of the first stated goals was confirmed, and then the progress towards these was discussed. If new goals were in place, these were discussed. In each interview some

"unfinished business" from the first interview took up the next portion of discussion and reflection. Further detail was added to incidents either discussed or implied in the first meeting. Informants were asked to expand on one or two of these, or to comment on their personal impact. I was trying to "flesh out" information I felt I had missed in the first interview, or I was looking for differences in the principal's view of the incident or story from a point of greater distance.

A particularly significant question was: "Have you changed anything as a result of any critical incident?" New critical incidents were identified and discussed. I asked for a story about an incident to try and get a sense of the events that led up to an incident, the incident itself, and the impact on the people involved. I then asked for a description of a typical day in the second term. I was looking for further confirmation of goals in action, and congruence or lack thereof with the first typical day.

I asked at some point in the second interview if there had been more surprises, more unexpected events, or more incidents that they felt unprepared for. Also asked was: "Have there been any physiological changes since the school year began?" I had an impression that each of the principals was tired, perhaps somewhat

discouraged, and I was searching for some sign to confirm this erosion of energy level or spirit. The second interview ended with repeated assurances that transcripts would be sent to them for review.

Interview Three

The third interviews took place at the end of April or in the beginning of May. This was timed to miss Easter and the Spring holidays, as well as the budget deadlines, and an important District deadline for the identification of students with special needs. In addition, I wanted to meet with the principals at a time when they had a feeling that their year was beginning to draw to a close, but when they were not yet caught up in the year end "flurry" of reports due, special events at schools, and reduced energy levels. As it turned out, the interview took place at the end of the fairly lengthy budget process for the school district. (Detailed plans for a subsequent school year were to be generated with input from the entire staff. These were then to be submitted to the associate superintendents, and afterward, defended to a sub committee of trustees.)

The third interview began with a link to the last interview, and some seeking of clarification or extension of some incidents or events from the previous

sessions. I then asked for continued identification of critical incidents, encouraging the principal to tell one or two stories about these incidents. I asked if what they had considered "critical" in the beginning of their year could be considered "critical" at this stage. I asked then for reflection on the types of problems they had dealt with. In asking for a typical day a third time, I was searching for a sense of the match between goals and action, and whether or not the typical day remained the same through the first, second and third observations.

Answers to a question as to whether or not they intended to remain in their position gave insight into the degree of personal sacrifice they thought their first year had involved, and the level of comfort they had with their new role. Discussing goals or forecasts for the next school year gave the principals an opportunity to look forward from their inaugural experience. Their responses to this question also gave some indication as to whether or not they were thinking in longer range terms, or whether they were essentially making decisions and dealing with situations on a day to day basis. Of particular importance in this interview were answers to the following questions: What was a highlight of the year? What did they learn? What would they recommend to others? What would they

do differently? Was their year what they expected it would be? Would they remain a principal?

At the end of the discussions and reflections, assurances were given again about confidentiality of information shared. The transcripts and a draft of the contents of the data and analysis chapter of the thesis were promised.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the data were transcribed in verbatim form. Respondents were asked to read transcripts and give further input where information was not clear, to fill in a missing word or two that could not be retrieved in the transcription process, or to mark all areas they did not wish to be used in the study. Their approval was sought about each transcript before categories were generated from the data. Although verbatim transcriptions were given to them, it was made clear that the material to be used in the study would be edited to rid passages of the oral language syntax. In addition, excerpts chosen would be generalized so that the identity of individuals or schools would be masked. The portion of the thesis that contained references to individual "stories" from the interviews was shared with the informants before the first draft of the thesis was submitted.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were examined in terms of the major questions asked in the original proposal:

1. What did principals expect would happen in their first year?
2. What did they expect to accomplish?
3. What really happened?
4. What were the critical incidents?
5. What were the differences between expectation and reality?
6. What surprised them?
7. What did they find themselves unprepared for?
8. What did they learn?
9. What recommendations would they make?

Categories were developed from the data that were gathered, by making notations on the master transcripts to match the semi-structured "agenda" for each interview, and by labelling all other topics that were discussed. There were similarities in category labels, generally from the structure of the interview questions themselves, for example, "surprises," "new critical incidents," "follow up on earlier critical incidents," and so on. Within the categories, however, there was a

great deal of variation in content in keeping with the individuality of situations and comments.

Once the categories were identified, the data were then resorted, looking for themes. At about the fourth sort, themes that I thought might be meaningful or helpful for a reader began to come into focus. These were checked with a colleague to see if they sounded like reasonable findings from the data, and were discussed with my advisor.

In keeping with the intent of interpretive research, other than to develop themes or more general categories, every effort was made to preserve the unique individuality of experiences discussed. Some of the "stories" were chosen from each of the respondent's transcripts, because they demonstrated the uniqueness or poignancy of a particular principal's experiences, or because I thought they would provide an opportunity for others to recognize their own experience or situation. Information was analyzed and recorded in such a way that it would take the reader into situations being presented. "Thick description" was chosen so that others would be able to see themselves, or be able to feel as if they had "been there" after reading about the events experienced. For some of the participants, the recording of these descriptions, or the telling of their "stories," and the publishing of

the same, was a crucial link to the cleansing opportunities that the study provided.

In general, there was emphasis on recording information or delineating events, of seeking understanding or looking for insights, in short, in making discoveries about the first year principal's experiences.

Credibility, Dependability and Trustworthiness

In keeping with the criteria for naturalistic research, assurances were given that the true value, applicability consistency and neutrality of the findings emerging from the study would be maintained. This was accomplished by focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as described by Guba and Lincoln (1982). An explanation of these assurances follows.

Data obtained in this study are credible because of the methods used in conducting the research. In essence, the data are credible because the people who generated the data verified it, and because others verified it as believable. As Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggested, the data were gathered from human sources so that they were "trackable, verifiable, and grounded in the real life situations from which they were derived"

(p. 250). There was prolonged engagement with the respondents to get a sense of the context of their experiences and to ensure that incidents being discussed were not biased, and that they demonstrated "prominent characteristics" of the principal and their setting. There was persistent observation of the respondents to reach an understanding of their "essences," and to be able to recognize critical and less significant elements being observed, discussed or gleaned in interviews.

Peer review of the data and the methodology revealed observations and information gathered to be consistent with expectation. The advisor read transcripts, as well as plans for the interviews. She gave input, clarified points, suggested areas for follow up, and helped with some testing of insights. In addition, peer review of the analysis occurred through another principal not associated with the study, and the advisor. These discussions revealed themes and categories to be consistent with the data gathered. In addition, the data, categories, and themes were verified by other principals in similar situations as making "sense" and being believable.

The principals read through transcripts of the interviews, and the first draft of the analysis of the data. They were able to verify that the data were

recorded as presented to me, and that they represented the meaning the principals had intended to convey. I asked that they mark areas in the transcripts where more information was required, or where inaccuracies or confidential matters were noted. These were rectified before data were taken from transcripts for inclusion in the study. At the start of the second and third interviews, the transcripts were briefly discussed before the taping began. Opportunity was provided to add, correct or delete data at the time of the second and third interviews, in addition to the written feedback given on the returned transcripts.

A variety of perspectives were examined through an internal triangulation of the data. Data gathered in the first and second interviews were expanded, and perceptions were checked, verified, or clarified in subsequent interviews. In the second and third interviews, care was taken to paraphrase data, to check perceptions, and to follow up on details to ensure that the data were complete and accurate. An incident discussed in the first interviews was "tracked" in the subsequent interviews to discover the progression of events.

Throughout the study, an audit trail was maintained. This "trail" consists of all of the interview tapes, a master transcript of each interview

showing categories and themes, as well as journal notes and a log noting reflections, impressions and possible themes.

Generalizability of the data was assured by the gathering and reporting of "thick description" about incidents and events. Transferability of the data was assured by making comparisons about the types of incidents gathered from the principals, as well as through perception checking data with other principals and my advisor. Through careful selection of the principals, purposive sampling assured that a wide range of data would be gathered.

Confirmability was assured through triangulation as described earlier, and through a constant search for underlying biases, prejudices and assumptions. In addition data were carefully checked to ensure that each could be traced back to original transcripts or journal entries.

Summary

The methodology used in this study is based on the interpretive paradigm. In keeping with the a naturalistic approach, data were gathered in semi-structured interviews with four first year elementary school principals selected. The informants

received information about the study and willingly expressed interest and a desire to take part. Anonymity and confidentiality of people and situations were assured. A pilot study was conducted to practice interviewing, transcribing and analyzing skills.

Data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews in an interactive approach of question asking, probing for stories about experiences, and encouraging reflection about critical incidents. Interviews had a basic "agenda" but generally followed the lead of the individual principal's discussion.

Data were analyzed on the basis of the major questions proposed. Categories were developed and major themes explored. Stories describing what it means to be a first year principal were presented in thick description format to attempt to "take the reader there."

Credibility, dependability and trustworthiness were maintained throughout by prolonged engagement with the principals, peer debriefing, triangulation and the maintenance of an audit trail.

Principals had opportunity to read transcripts and the fourth chapter before data were submitted in the last draft of the thesis. The data are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter contains a description of the data gathered from interviews with four first year elementary school principals in a large urban area, over a one year period. This is an account of the interviews and an attempt to illustrate the impact of critical incidents on the subsequent actions and on the meanings they held for "the principal." Through the use of stories from our discussions, I will attempt to demonstrate what the principals expected would happen, critical incidents that occurred, unexpected incidents (not only what these were, but perhaps why and how they took place), and what the principals learned from these experiences. In addition I will explore categories identified from the respondents' interviews and themes which emerged from the data.

A principal's leadership reality is a constant construction process. The "leadership realities" of four first year principals were absolutely that. Although there were some general commonalities about

their experiences, their inaugural year was essentially a very individual story of survival. I saw as critical the preservation of the distinct individuality of each of the first year experiences, and have attempted to maintain the uniqueness of these. At the risk of sounding contradictory, I did find some commonalities among the "rookie" principals. Each of the respondents began their first year with some goals or expectations for themselves and for their organization. In addition, each encountered critical incidents during their first year. Although the impact of these incidents varied, as individuals clarified for themselves what their role in the school was, critical incidents began to influence the initial goals.

In a further attempt to preserve the uniqueness and individuality of beginning principal experiences, I have used the six problem questions stated in the third chapter as a focus for the presentation of the data, but have not discussed "answers" to these original questions directly. The data are presented in a chronological fashion over the course of the three interviews to highlight the growth and development of the individuals. In the first interview I focused on the reception the new principal encountered, an identification of goals, the first critical incidents, surprises encountered, and a typical day of activities

or events. Categories generated from the data reflected this question sequence. The experiences of four beginning principals follows.

What the Principals Expected Would Happen

The Beginning

"Am I really ready for this?"

"Oh my God! What have I done?"

"How far is it to get to this new place? Come to think of it - where is this place?"

"Is this what I really want?"

"What's going to happen to my class?"

These are the first thoughts of five principals who have just been informed that they have been appointed as new principals. Four of them are the thoughts of first year principals. In gathering data from four first year principals and recalling my experiences as such, the overwhelming response to an appointment was a delicious combination of naivete about what was about to unfold, enthusiasm for their work, willingness to work hard for what they believed in, a desire to influence what happens for students in classrooms, and raw fright. These first moments swallow their self doubt, and then become a

rationalization in a variety of ways that "I think I can - I think I can - I **know** I can."

One of the " first reaction" stories was particularly delightful.

> When I talked to my Associate in March, we had agreed that I would spend another year in Junior High. So, I was sound asleep in bed, sawing logs and having a wonderful time and the phone rang at quarter to twelve. I picked up the phone as only I could and said, "Hello" and my Associate identified himself.
> He said, "You know how you wanted to go back to an elementary?"
> I said "Yes."
> And he said, "Well you're going back to elementary but not as Assistant Principal."
> So I thought "Oh my God. I've been demoted." I thought, "I know I've made a few faux pas here in my life but he could have given me some warning."
> So he said, "I'm pleased to tell you that you are going back to Brownsville Elementary as the Principal."
> And I said, "No I'm not."
> And he said: "Yes you are."
> And I said: "No I'm not."
> And he said: "Yes you are."
> And I said: "I can't."
> And he said: "Why not?"
> And I said: "Because I didn't apply."
> And he said: "It's too late, because the Board of Trustees have just approved it. Show up at eight o'clock tomorrow morning for this meeting downtown." So....I hung up the phone and shock set in. So I went back to bed. I have very life-like or very vivid dreams, so I lay there, then finally I got out of bed and I walked around for a while. Then I went back to bed and lay down for a while, and about two o'clock I thought, "What if I dreamt this? What if I show up tomorrow morning and everybody says, 'Christie....why are you here?'" I mean I know a few consultants, maybe I could wing my way through it but (pause). So who do you phone at six in the morning to confirm this? You don't phone anyone. What you do is you phone one of your siblings that lives half way across the country, making it four or five o'clock in the morning their time, saying, "You want to

> hear something scary? Guess what I'm going to be doing?"
> Then I phoned my parents and my father can't understand you so he says, "Slow down. Let me tell you about my golf game...."
> And I said, "But Dad, Dad you don't understand."
> And he said, "Well I'm not going to wake your mother, we'll call you tomorrow." So then about four thirty in the morning I got up and had a shower, and decided what to wear. I got half way through curling my hair with a curling iron and the curling iron broke down. I of course had no replacement, so I showed up at the meeting downtown at a quarter to eight in the morning looking like a bag lady off 97th Street. And that's the story of my initial twelve hours after being informed."

These first thoughts give insight into the degree of preparedness of these individuals for their first principalship. Even the most "mature," insightful, or knowledgeable of the principals encountered in the study met surprises in that first assignment. In spite of the fact that some principals had related experiences or other leadership roles which might have prepared them for what would happen, there was still an element of "I didn't expect this to happen" involved. Did they view themselves as a principal? Did they have a sense of what they would be doing each day? What were they expected to do each day? These became questions in the back of my mind as I compared what they were telling me, with their expressed goals and actions. I was looking for overt as well as covert messages to tell me what each principal expected in their first year as a principal. The stories of the

appointments themselves gave me some insight into their preparedness for their new positions.

Two of the principals had applied for principalships, two had simply been in the right place at the right time and they were pleasantly surprised by their appointment. One had not applied, and had not really expected the appointment, while two others had been longing for a principalship. Generally the news came to them in a late evening, sometimes sleep-interrupting, phone call: "Guess what? You have just been appointed....," or "I hope you like to drive, because....," or "We think you're the person for [X] School. Will you accept this position?" (followed by a feeling that they had about twenty seconds to decide) or "You have been granted your wish to go to an elementary school, but not as an assistant principal."

That there was shock for the four principals (admittedly in varying degrees) about their appointment revealed that they were not yet able to see themselves in the role of principal.

First Goals

Once the shock of the announcement of their appointment had receded somewhat, the second thoughts were perhaps equally revealing about what they expected in a first year of a principalship, and about what lay

ahead for these educators. All four first year principals had ideas about how they ought to begin their new role. They expressed a variety of goals, dreams, hopes and plans for their new school, and their new role.

> I wanted to introduce myself to the staff, so I took a bouquet of spring flowers to the staff at coffee time, and wished them a good summer, saying that I looked forward to seeing them in September and to working with them.

One of the principals told her staff that she wanted to "watch, look, see, find out, grow from" them. Because of feedback from the community, information he knew about his new school before he accepted the principalship, and goals and expectations staff members shared, another principal knew that time and energy had to be spent regaining the confidence of the school community. High on his priority list were building positive recognition of staff and students in the school, increasing the positive public relations of the school, and dealing with staff issues. Another principal wanted to focus on programming, and maintain the status quo in other areas. In addition he wanted to explore whole language and manipulative math approaches as part of the programming objectives for his school. One principal's goal was to get to know the staff, the students and the community and to

realize her "dream" for the school. She described her dream school:

> A dream of a school for me is when a child comes in, the first thought that crosses their mind is "Boy am I glad I'm here," and then, "Boy I'd like to stay here. Everyone in the school is a friend. People help me here." The school is a "haven" for a child but also one where they feel encouraged, successful in their work, and they feel that they are truly learning.

And so began their first year. There was a feeling of optimism and excitement expressed in the principals' recollections of the start of their year, almost like Anne of Green Gables' conviction that, "Tomorrow is all fresh with no mistakes in it." I wondered at the start of the first interviews if their general positive enthusiasm and excitement would be maintained throughout the year. The degree of change in these goals, and the match with their daily prioritizing of tasks, later gave insight into the congruence between what they expected, and what happened.

Critical Incidents Defined

The critical incidents the principals identified, and the way they responded to them, gave insight into the way they saw themselves. The identification of these incidents gave further insight as to whether or not they expected certain events to occur, expected

that they would have to deal with them, and had given any degree of proactive thought to having in place a consistent, calm and "wise" plan for doing so. Three of the principals considered many incidents to be "critical." One of the principals had difficulty grasping the meaning of "critical incident" because most events were viewed as being critical by him. At least two of the principals (this varied throughout the study) dealt with critical incidents on a daily basis, from the time they arrived at school, any time after 7:00 in the morning until they left at the end of the day.

Many day to day events were seen as critical by two or three of the principals throughout their first year, because they were still in the process of shaping their responses to situations. One of the principals said,

> I think for survival's sake you initially want to see what's happening and weigh all the pros and cons of situations, but you just can't do that. You don't have wait time. You have to call a situation as you see it and live with the ramifications that go with the decisions you make.

Another remarked that she was "everywhere, making judgements" and asking herself "should I say something, should I save it, should I talk to the person later, talk to them now?" A third principal observed that "unfortunately, I haven't seen a manual that tells you

what you do and what you don't do, and what you do take seriously and what you don't."

Some incidents were identified as critical because there was no time for contemplation before acting. Three principals talked about being "totally responsible for so many things" on someone else's time schedule or request. While clarifying their own evolving belief system, they found themselves in situations with which they had little previous experience, and they were unable to refer to a tested set of values which would guide their action, or a repertoire of strategies which would be acceptable to those involved.

Meeting the Staff

The on the job training of the new principals began when they met their new staff. Two of the principals were known to the staff at the new school. Even so, they still encountered a mixture of greetings by them. How the new principals were received by the new school staff gave a feel for the type of "baptism" into administration they were about to experience. In addition, the principals' reactions to the first meetings with staff gave insight into their expectations for their new position.

One principal was greeted with: "She's a woman!" Her reply was: "Right she is!" This principal was replacing a male. She virtually "killed" the possibility of a gender issue through her simple reply to the first person who expressed surprise about her being a woman.

> I think there is an element there of women working for women, or men working for women in my job. My approach in the school was, "I am working with you people, you are not working for me." That does not mean I will not make decisions that need to be made, but it is a group effort and we would work from that, and we would do a lot of discussing. I think the woman aspect had to have a bit of time. I think they were very curious as to what I believed about children, about the school, about the feeling in the school and my expectations of them.

In subsequent discussion with this principal, gender had not been an issue in her first year. In that same interview session this principal said:

> People are just now starting to say, "Now I know why you're doing this," or "I understand it more." At first, I often thought, "Well, why doesn't this professional know what to do here?", or "Why would they do this to a child?". But then I think we are all learners, whether you're young or old and they may be learning something or doing it in a different way and I must have as much patience and sensitivity and tolerance of the learner, in their learning, that I would a child in my classroom. But you often expect them to be your challenge people, or your professionals that they would catch on faster and I don't think that's always a reality.

One principal recalled her first meeting with her staff:

> I was greeted by the caretaker. Some of the staff

> I knew, one staff member from before in a teaching capacity and that was fine. There seemed not to be any concerns. I knew this one person, and I knew about the others. Other staff members were fairly new and young in their careers. There was this bubbling enthusiasm. They seemed ready to roll and have a good time with their teaching. They were all pumped up and when I said, "Hey, I'm looking forward to the year." They said they were too.

Quickly, staff members approached and wanted to know where she "stood" on issues. Typically, questions began with: "What's your policy on. . . .?" The head caretaker was one of the first to meet and establish a set of expectations for himself in the context of the new administration.

> I hadn't been here more than ten minutes when the head caretaker came to meet me. I said, "Anytime you need to talk, let me know" and he did. So we had a really good talk about what my expectations were.

Another principal said the staff received him as the person who was going to "provide energy and motivation, who is going to be innovative in planning, who will program to meet kids' needs, who will listen, and who will make decisions based on the needs of the whole."

Another principal was greeted with wariness. She recalled comments overheard or speculated about her presence: "She's a woman, she's a rookie and she's young." She portrayed these as "strikes against her" as she began her first year with a new staff. She did

feel there was a sense that the staff were willing to "give her a go" in spite of these "handicaps," however.

The fourth principal was received with a welcoming banner and congratulatory card from the staff.

> There was some reluctance from a couple of people. We differed on philosophy and how kids should be handled, but the reception was very good and very positive.

The Secretary

School secretaries were significant in all of the first year principals' lives at the start of their year, and then increasingly so throughout the year. The secretaries represented the tradition carriers in each of the schools in varying degrees of subtlety. In one of the schools this was very evident. There was almost a feeling that the new principal was betraying the wishes and well established procedures of the previous principal. One secretary in particular continuously defended these previous principal's requests or routines in her actions. In the absence of the principal, this secretary would not comply with the principal's directions about newsletters to the community. In addition, she would use the public address system in a manner that was contrary to the wishes of the principal (using trivial reasons to interrupt classes or the entire school while classes

were in session). This was clearly not within the new principal's realm of acceptability, and it was also an example of information the principal took some time to discover.

> The secretary was not too receptive to new ideas. She wanted things to be the way they were, and why was I making changes to the format of the newsletter? I know that she had been given a lot of power by the previous administrator to run things. Feedback I had from parents and teachers was not very favourable as to her having all this authority and being so "bossy." Things would change if I was out of the school. When it came to performance appraisal time, she was not too receptive about some of the things we talked about.

In another school the secretary, among other things, was used to less than perfection in written communications within the school as well as those that were going out to the community.

> I found out the previous principal had done all his own typing. I then found out that he had done a lot of his own stuff and as a result the staff rarely saw him. I began to make other discoveries. The secretary couldn't read an FMRS (budget) statement, do the bookkeeping, operate our computer system and other things I thought a secretary D should be able to do. She had very little confidence in herself. So this became a project right away. I called in some consultants, and we began building some familiarity with her role and building of skills. This changing that wasn't going to occur, suddenly began to happen.

Although this situation was faced with less animosity and confrontation, it was another demonstration of the impact of a previous tradition on the new principal.

The school secretary was the person whom the principal worked with directly on a daily basis, who was on the "inside track" about events, and who therefore was in a very powerful position to assist the other staff members in accepting the new administrator. All four principals expected to find support and professionalism in this important member of their "administrative team," but this did not always occur.

> I think it was important that I get the message across that I was the person in control. I wanted to talk with her and hear from her, but I didn't want her to tell me what to do and when to do it. It was a tough one because she held a very powerful position, she's been here many years, and she had some allies in some long standing staff members. I'd find her being curt on the phone, and expressing a preference for the regular program and demonstrating prejudice against our special program. I'm working hard to give her positive direction and feedback, and give her responsibility in areas that I think are hers. We're also getting a computer to reduce her work load. It was tough at first, but I think things are improving.

In two cases they openly defied the new principal and interfered with decisions made. In one case she was "willing to give her new principal a go." It took some time for trust to establish, but it did evolve through open communication and the willingness of both parties to cooperate. In the fourth case, the secretary was totally positive and supportive.

Support Staff

Support staff also played a significant part in the principal's acceptance by the staff. Like their expectation of school secretaries, the principals expected to find support staff to be welcoming, cooperative and supporting. This was particularly observable in the comments of one principal. After an initial conversation with the Head Caretaker, he expressed relief at the new principal's expressed priority for the school. She described their first encounter:

> We had a really good talk about what my expectations were. He had very specific questions and concerns about different purchases, and what my expectations were. I told him that if I knew the answer at the time I would give it. If I didn't I would say, "I'm going to have to look into that and I'll get back to you." I also indicated that I saw him in our school as an adult to help us provide for the children, and to provide a place and atmosphere that is warm and inviting. I said that I would support him in that role and that I did not want him to be the heavy "keep my floors clean" type of fellow. He seemed very positive about that. His comment was, "I like to be liked by the kids."

Two principals indicated an early need to have regular contact and open communication with support staff. Two principals had to establish their authority with the support staff very early in the year. In one school, it led to a review of the role of this group in the school.

Once I had a sense of knowing what the principals expected, and felt as if I had vicariously met their new staffs, I began to focus on revealing and gaining insight into events taking place in these first year principals' schools. My focus in questioning and discussion turned to: What happened? Can you tell me more about it? The stories about these events follow.

What Happened

Data about their experiences are grouped under five categories. The first is labelled "critical incidents." Each principal and I discussed the meaning of this to arrive at a personal definition for those incidents that caused them to examine their values and beliefs. Other categories were: incidents involving teachers, isolation, incidents involving students, and a typical day.

Critical Incidents

All of the principals experienced "critical incidents." The majority of these related to problems or struggles with people about the principal's "fundamental beliefs" for the organization. Generally, the first critical incidents happened quickly, continuously, and without warning. In two of the

schools these continued at a dizzying pace. One of the principals listed the day to day coping with these incidents as a critical incident in itself.

> Day one started with a bang, when different staff members came in and told me what it was they wanted to do. Their remarks were often prefaced with: "I was promised...."
>
> Parental involvement started fast and right off the bat. I had parents object to the placement of their child on the first day of school.

Incidents Involving Teachers

All of the principals experienced challenges to their authority in varying degrees. Some were related to the threat of involvement of the Provincial Teachers' Association. Other challenges came from continual interference with communication, with decisions made, or with "sabotaging" information, decisions, or to the opinions of other people in the organization. Some challenges came in the form of direct defiance of the principal's requests or in non-compliance with decisions made, or direction of the school under the new principal. Some of these incidents were a result of "older" staff adjusting to the "new kid on the block" and refusing to do as the principal asked, or in keeping with the wishes of the majority.

> This was a teacher who expected division 1 kids to come into her class and just totally listen to her. She hadn't been able to individualize or

> look into individual needs., She was quite negative in her dealings with me. She had a difficult assignment and was refusing to discuss it or accept help in dealing with it.

Three of the principals were dealing with what they called a "blocker" teacher. This person was resistant to just about everything. At the time of the first interviews there had been some one on one discussions with the staff members involved, but little positive impact in one case, and a glimmer of hope in one other. These authority "struggles" indicated the power of the support of the people in the new principal's organization. The nature and amount of the support (or lack thereof) was expressed as one of many factors contributing to the positive feelings of the principal.

More than one of the principals had to meet with a staff member or two and "clear the air." One principal expressed it this way:

> I had to call them in and say, "Are you going to be able to live with this, because I'm going to be here whether you like it or not? I think it's important for you to be aware of where I'm coming from."

The territorial nature of staff was seen as being a critical incident for one principal. "Some of them, because of the nature of their programs are very isolated, therefore, they feel the need of being in control of everything in their situation."

One principal waited until the communication from the informal network stacked to a level she could no longer ignore, and then called in a staff member who had been complaining about a large classroom enrolment. The principal asked for open communication about her "beef" rather than all of the chatter behind the principal's back.

> I was dealing with a grade 1 teacher who told me she could no longer tolerate a group with 31 kids in it in the afternoons. I said we didn't have enough money for another half time teacher. She suggested a teacher aide. I told her I hadn't thought of that, but it sounded like a good idea. The teacher's jaw dropped when I immediately picked up the phone and asked personnel to find us a half time aide for the class. I apologized to her for not thinking of it sooner and thanked her for coming in to tell me about the situation. The grape vine later told me that she had pounded my desk and demanded action. Whatever the version, I was glad she did.

In the end, the teacher was able to make a suggestion that solved the problem to everyone's satisfaction. The principal pointed out the time lost while the teacher talked to everyone but the person who could fix it, and asked that next time she speak up about concerns or problems. The working relationship of the teacher and principal subsequently improved greatly. The teaching staff were seen in an adversarial position for two of the principals. "Things are better now, but at the beginning it was me against them."

Having to transfer a staff member from the school because of lower than expected pupil enrolment was cited as a critical incident by one principal. Another principal referred to the process of "declaring a staff member eligible for transfer" later in the school year as a "very tough decision." This was described as one of the hardest decisions and one where the loneliness of the administrative role began to emerge.

Isolation

All but one of the principals described a feeling of being "abandoned" at some point in the first interview. Who could they turn to for confirmation that they were right? Who would be available to help them? Who would be a sounding board? That they had to decide on their own was not so much a surprise, as it was a source of worry and adjustment for them. Their support networks came from spouses, friends, previous principals and mentors, colleagues, and a leadership enhancement program in the district, but essentially each of them "stood alone." There were some matters that they could not disclose to others in the organization. Matters relating to teacher competency, staff hiring and firing, staff evaluation, and day to day joys and frustrations could not be discussed. The reasons for decisions made, or the background to a

problem had to be kept to the principal, perhaps a trusted colleague, or to superiors, who also evaluated them. Indeed, the very fact that some of these types of matters were not presented in the data was an effort to preserve confidentiality, or to avoid breaching professional ethics. All four principals had at least one issue, concern or problem that fell into this category.

The lack of accessibility to a superior when needed, contributed to feelings of isolation for two of the principals. Referring to a superior, one principal stated that the superiors "were rarely available when I needed them."

Incidents Involving Students

A specific area where "all" could not be disclosed related to student issues. School discipline problems or issues concerning students were the topics of a continuing series of critical incidents. One principal was in the middle of dealing with a Division 1 youngster who had been "slam dunked" into a water fountain and had chipped a permanent tooth, when another set of students came into the office to surrender a set of "the most pornographic cards I had ever seen." At that precise moment, the Associate Superintendent walked into the office.

Another cited a situation involving a child and a parent about a case potentially involving Child Welfare.

> A parent who was new to our school had been informed by the teacher (I was already alerted to this) that we had a concern about her kid in grade 1, and that we might want to consult a social worker for advice. We weren't so much concerned with abuse in the strictest sense, and no one was saying this lady was a bad mother, it was just that the kid was late for school almost every morning. We thought we were dealing with an over protective mom who hangs on to her kid mainly to meet her needs. She said she'd bring in lawyers and her husband, even though they were divorced, and there was a lot of emotionalism and threatening exchanged. She was always at school at the end of the day to pick up her child. I talked with her one night after school about how hard it was for her child to become adjusted. She was really negative when I asked if we could talk about the situation, threatening to take her child out of the school. I indicated that we would communicate our concerns to other schools, and that it would be easier on her if we could work something out. We agreed on a time to meet. When she arrived for a meeting, we had a major confrontation at first. It turned out she had been abused as a kid herself, and she didn't want her child taken away. She did a lot of talking about herself, and it finally dawned on me that I knew this person. I had taught her years earlier in a special program I had been involved in. I recalled her first name, and we both made the connection to our previous relationship. There was some embarrassment, then some hugs and tears, and we were able to walk out arm in arm with the beginning of a solution for her kid.

Three principals described the impact of tradition as being perpetuated in their schools. One example is particularly effective in demonstrating the impact of tradition as reflected in the culture of the organization. In one school the staff used "orange

slips" to signal the principal about discipline problems.

> The problem with the orange slips is that I never know where they're going to show up. They may show up with the child, they may show up in my mail box, they may show up on my desk, they may show up after school, during school time. It's sort of like an adventure story, checking out all the places where there may or may not be an orange slip. Sometimes the staff members will present them to me, with the child in question and then sometimes they don't. So, once I discover one of these little forms, then I have to go track down the teacher (who may or may not be where you think she is) and then find out what happened. They usually tell you as concisely as possible what happened, because they're usually in the midst of teaching a class. Then you go and track down the child involved and nine times out of ten you usually get a different story. So then you go back to see the teacher to clarify some of the concerns, and then you try and deal with the problem. In the process of processing the orange slips whatever I was in the middle of doing - everything else - drops. I might be late to a meeting because of an orange slip. A meeting doesn't get started that I called because of an orange slip. If I was supposed to be observing in a teacher's class, I may be late, or I may not get there.

Problems between English and French programs, student groupings, teacher expectations, and community wishes in a school with a second language program were identified as critical in one principal's school.

> Why can't the French Immersion program staff expect to deal with regular groups of kids with varying needs too? There has been a streaming of the better IQ kids into this program and almost a dumping of the problems into regular classes. I say that every kid has the right to learn French unless he has an auditory processing problem. There's been a tendency, historically here, that some kids in the Immersion program cannot be successful and they've been encouraged by the

> teachers to move into the regular program. I don't believe in that, and I think there has to be some pretty hard evidence to make me change my thinking on this issue. Most kids should be able to stay in the program of their choice. There should be kids who get lower marks in both groups. I don't like the English side versus the French side and I want to change this attitude over the next few years. Once both programs have a blend of ability levels, and there are students leaving both programs in grade 6 (instead of just the regular program) reading at less than grade level, I'll know I've achieved this goal.

Working with two or more programs in a school presented extra challenges to the first year principals who generally did not have special training in that program field.

> It would be nice if I could hire an Assistant or a Curriculum Coordinator who could speak French. I go in to evaluate second language classes and I miss lots. I don't mind evaluating them, and I'm good at picking up lots of information - when you watch a good teacher teach, it doesn't matter what language they're in. To help me improve I go to bed at night listening to French radio, and I'm going to take an immersion course this summer. I can understand conversations in the staffroom now and it surprises people, when I add a comment to a "bellyaching" session a group of French teachers is having.

> I found myself in the middle of a budget process and I didn't even know what some of my people did. I'd never heard of In Home Specialists I and II, and AD's. I'd heard of PUG kids before, but I'd never had to work with them. There are special modifications to the physical building so we can get some of our handicapped kids out faster in the event of a fire.

> There are nine different funding levels in the school. We have a status epileptic who requires medical intervention to survive seizures. It's quite typical to have fire and ambulance vehicles descending on the school on a regular basis.

A Typical Day

The descriptions of a typical day made the nature of a first year principal's role obvious. All four principals admitted that they worked a long day, that they found getting to paper work difficult and that they tackled it at the early beginning, or the late finish of their day, or it went home in their briefcases. Three of the principals described their briefcase travelling home as a "security blanket." They didn't always work at home, but knowing their work was with them gave them a feeling of security. Three out of the four talked about their work as the "toughest" they had encountered. Words like "exhausting," "soul destroying," "gut wrenching," and "healing" alluded to the high degree of personal cost that went into their work. Perhaps this was more evident a factor because all four expressed that being a principal was part of their "life's work" not merely a "job." A tolerance for ambiguity, an ability to be a "quick change artist," managing stress and maintaining calm in the face of adversity were daily requirements, in varying degrees, for all four principals.

> Some days are frustrating when you're trying to get at other things. Like this morning, trying to track down the parent who sent a kid to school sick. It took over an hour. It would have been interesting to have been in a classroom doing some things with the kids.

One principal expressed frustration about "telephone tag," the process of rarely reaching the person that could answer a question, except that both parties were away from their phone each time the other called. Or, if she had been successful at reaching a person with the "answer" in the same day that she asked a question, the answer differed from the advice of others, or it was contradictory to her own instincts. One principal had revised a budget three times in response to advice sought and been given.

Typical days also included dealing with critical incidents, but maddeningly without predictability as to timing, severity, and number. These incidents, as well as the day to day events seemed to absorb much of the first year principal's time. At the first interviews there were many incidents identified as being critical. By the end of the third interview these had diminished. It wasn't as much a result of strengthened time management skills but rather that of the maddening tiny detailed items were no longer so time consuming because they knew whom to call, what the policy was, where to find something, what to say, and how to react to a situation.

> Part of it is that the day to day things seem to take an awfully long time. Perhaps it's because I try to take as much of the administrivia as I can away from my teachers so they can give the most they can to kids.

Three principals spent part of their typical days "on the move." Their experiences were very similar to the following description:

> I spend a large part of my day, or at least I have up until say the past month or so, going into classes, greeting the kids in the morning, being out in the hallway at recess time or after school, being out on supervision. Things like that.

Each time this principal put herself in this position, she "picked up" things to do by virtue of her accessibility to the people in her organization. Sometimes, she said it would have been easier for her to go into her office and "hide" in the paper tasks, but she viewed it as much more valuable to the organization for her to be "in" her school, not merely her office. Even in the sanctuary of an office, the "jobs" had a way of finding the principal.

> I spend the first half of the morning in transit much to the chagrin of my secretary. After that I go in and try to wrap up some of the things that happened the day before with kids, unless a fresh batch of orange slips have found me. Then I'm out on supervision. Before I know it it's lunch time and a chance to check in with the lunch room people.

The way critical incidents were handled impacted on the principal and the people in the organization in a variety of ways and degrees of significance. Some of the incidents were anticipated, but not the circumstances around them, or the complicated factors that were their setting. Other incidents were not

anticipated. They presented surprises - sometimes total surprises for the principals.

The Surprises

There was evidence of a gap between what principals expected and what really happened, even in the first interview. Although two of the principals knew much about their school, the staff, the community and some of the issues, they still encountered surprises. They varied amongst the four informants, but it began to show when I asked about a honeymoon, and about surprises encountered.

The Honeymoon

All of the principals experienced a reaction to their arrival, although they did not always consider it a "honeymoon." Perceptions about a honeymoon and whether or not they were still on it were revealing. One said he did not know whether he had had a honeymoon, or perhaps he was still on it. Another said she ended her own honeymoon by "being Miss Curious." She would notice things and think she needed to say something rather than "save it." When asked what types of incidents or events made her "speak up," she indicated that people speaking in what she thought was

a "hurtful way to students" made her break silence. This was essentially a surprise for this principal. She did not expect to have to deal with this sort of behaviour in teachers. One of the principals responded this way to the question about a honeymoon. The question posed to her was: "Did you have a honeymoon here?" She replied:

> Yeah, I guess so. You know, walk by and see who the new person is in the office. Yeah, but it didn't fall through, like one day the skies didn't just open up. Things started to show themselves that I had concerns about, and I think that's because I was Miss Curious, and was around everywhere and noting this, noting that, having to make a lot of judgements, should I say anything, should I save it, should I talk to the person later, talk to them now? The children were no problem to deal with. So, I ended it for myself, just by being curious.

Another principal responded: "Honeymoon? I didn't even get to the preacher - I got jilted at the altar."

The Unexpected

Surprises were encountered by each principal. These were the events and issues that the principals did not expect to happen. They were not prepared to deal with some critical incidents and yet they were staring them in the face often with no warning, and usually while at least one other incident was occurring. These incidents raised several questions for the new principals: Is this what I really like

doing? Do I really want to do this work? Can I do this work? Am I doing any good here? Can I survive this? How can I find answers or help to deal with these issues? Does anybody care about me?

Reactions ranged from shock to mild disappointment. Some were positive surprises, although these stories were shared first by only one of the principals. This principal came back to school after a meeting and found his office filled with about 150 "Happy Birthday" balloons and a banner that read "Happy Birthday Chief." Later that same day there was a cake and then a surprise assembly involving members of the community, and a "Scheme-a-Dream" clown. Another said:

> You call downtown and say you're the principal of [X] School and you'd like help with this question, and they say, "When would you like it, sir?"

All of the principals experienced surprises about something. Generally these were seen as a negative aspect of their work. One principal described an incident at the very beginning of her year:

> I felt that I had established a very reasonable relationship with my custodial staff, and figured from everything I observed that things were well on the way to the school being ready for school opening. Over the last weekend of the summer I had come in to do some finishing touches on some work, and discovered to my complete embarrassment that the school was not at all ready for people to come in to it. I knew that this was my responsibility and I had to figure out a solution in the middle of my feelings of anger and betrayal.

Critical Incidents Continue

Having to deal with "heavy duty problems" on the first morning of school caught at least two of the principals off guard. One principal found himself having to hire a specialist for a position and he did not even know what that person's job was. That teachers were expected to act and make judgements as professionals and that they ought to have known "certain things," yet did not, was a source of difficulty for at least two of the principals.

> My most unfavourite line which I have received and still receive is "What is your policy on. . . .?" "What is your policy on children coming back into the school to get their mittens?" Heaven forbid that we will ever have policies about coming into schools for mittens. I think it shows, though you have done it once, twice, fifty times, what you say and what you do, it takes a year, maybe even more for people to know what you say and that you mean what you say. People are just now starting to say, "Now I know why you're doing this," or "I understand it more," and at first, I often think, "Well, why doesn't this professional know what to do here?", or "Why would they do this to a child?" Then I think we are all learners, whether you're young or old and they may be learning something or doing it in a different way and I must have as much patience and sensitivity and tolerance of the learner, in their learning, that I would a child in my classroom. But you often expect them to be your challenge people, or your professionals that they would catch on faster and I don't think that's always reality.

That "things were said to children, about children which I believe were hurtful" was a source of surprise for one principal. Discipline matters in general, and

not always to do with the children, surprised two principals. Teachers making appointments for what he referred to as "not the best reasons" (for example a hair appointment) on school time was one of the experiences one principal encountered in this area. A teacher-centered versus child-centered program was a surprise and yet not a surprise for one principal. She was hoping not to find this, and expressed disappointment that she did have to deal with it.

Being Overwhelmed

A feeling of being "swamped" by all that they had to deal with was expressed by three of the principals as a surprise. They knew that they were going to be busy, but as busy as they were was unanticipated.

> You feel you're doing so many things all of the time and you wonder whether you really have a pulse on everything.

Another talked about doing everything all on his own. He implied that he missed the collegiality of a partnership (an assistant, a coordinator or department head).

> I think there were just so many things that I had to be totally responsible for right away.

By the third interview they no longer expressed this as a difficulty. One principal expressed a greater "comfort level" with herself, and that as a

result her staff had begun to respond less formally to her. She recalled that they were "more open to make comments", that she was "willing to put her money where her mouth was". Perhaps even more significantly, she said of herself:

> I guess I'm realizing that I can't do any more than what I'm already doing. I'd have liked to make more progress in a couple of changes, for example our discipline policy. I would have liked to accomplish more in the area of self esteem of our students, but you've got education week, the third report cards, the last term events. There's only so much you can ask the staff to do.

Parents

Parents were a source of worry for three of the principals.

> I didn't expect to have to deal with the aggressiveness and the challenges into power struggles of some of the parents.
>
> The parents don't see themselves as an advisory group, they want to be like the trustees.

One principal had difficulty dealing with what he perceived to be the pettiness of some problems (for example, who should sign a set of thank you notes), when there were so many really important other issues going on (like the suicide of a parent of one of the students). This principal recognized the valuable role of the parent group and welcomed their presence, but sometimes felt "annoyed" at the time they took from other "important" work.

A Typical Day

A typical day revealed whether or not there was a congruence between the goals ascribed by the principal and the actual prioritizing of the days' events, tasks and decisions to be made.

The typical day "revisited" in the second and third interviews, differed somewhat for each principal, and quite a bit for two of them. One principal described herself as essentially "stuck in an office" according to the incidents being dealt with, although this was not evident in her remarks about a typical day. The other three described a typical day and incidents that "matched" the goals expressed by them at the first and second interview.

By the end of the first interviews, I had a sense that what principals expected to happen, and what really did happen, differed. I marvelled at the courage and energy of the four "rookies" and wondered whether the second interviews would also demonstrate this.

The Second Interviews

In the second interview, the focus was on checking the progress of goals expressed in the first interview,

following up on events that occurred as a result of the first critical incidents, gathering stories about new critical incidents, exploring the unexpected events, asking about a typical day, and generally letting the principal talk and reflect aloud. Categories generally followed these agenda items, but began to broaden to capture serendipidous data.

Second Term Goals

By the time of the second interview, well into the second term, the principals said that the goals expressed in the first interview had been somewhat refocused. Generally, the principals described that they were "on track" with originally stated goals, but that these had become much more specific, or had moved into another or a related area seen as more critical. One of the principal's goals had been to spend time and energy regaining the confidence of the community, of building positive recognition of students in the school, of increasing the positive public relations of the school, and of dealing with some staff issues. By the second interview, he felt quite positive about the progress of the first three goals, and was concentrating on working with staff members. Like many others, he was working patiently on the staff "issues." Another principal had wanted to focus on programming,

and maintain the status quo in other areas. Exploring whole language and manipulative math approaches were his aim. At the time of the second interview he was buried in this goal and was also working on staff "issues." Another principal had basically accomplished her goals of getting to know staff and students, and she was already beginning to look ahead into the next year to plan a longer range view for herself and for the school.

Second Term Situations

In the second term, two principals continued to deal with ethical issues. The incidents themselves, as well as the "fallout" from them, were shared in general terms. I got a palpable feeling of the frustration and helplessness they encountered in trying to face these types of situations. Without disclosing the details, at the time of the second interview, one of these was resolved, one was simmering on the back burner, and the other was in the process of escalating to some sort of "explosion."

In the second interview, I observed that two of the principals were essentially "mired" in the day to day running of their school. As reflected in their descriptions of a typical day, two principals spent the majority of each day hopping from "crisis to crisis."

One other principal seemed to be settling into a routine for herself, and the fourth seemed to be in charge of his day rather than the reverse. I asked one of the principals about "crisis hopping," and whether or not he felt as if he started with an empty desk each morning and it just "layered" throughout the day.

> I very rarely have an empty desk, and I don't know that it's crises, I think lots of times the things on my desk get treated as crises and they shouldn't. Maybe this is because when I try to deal with something I find out, "Oh, I'm sorry they're at an inservice," or "they're out for coffee," or "they're gone from their desk right now," or "they're unavailable," etc. etc. And then you have all these pieces hanging around because you're waiting for answers for different things from different people. They obviously don't treat them as crises, so why should I? I need to smarten up about some of those things. Unfortunately, I haven't seen a manual that sort of tells you what you do and what you don't do, and what you do take seriously and what you don't take seriously. You're almost afraid some days to run around and have fun. In fact I distinctly remember last Wednesday morning, saying to my secretary, "You know things aren't going too bad. I've got my budget pretty much worked out, the staff knows where we're going, we've kind of decided what we want to do, we worked on it pretty well as a group, people seem to be pretty supportive about what we're doing, things aren't bad." "Bang!" In walks this lady, who goes up one side of me, down the other. Tell yourself that doesn't bother you. No of course not, you just start thinking about all the aides you're not going to have or all the help you're not going to have in the school any more, and how can anybody, that I thought was so cooperative be so unreasonable?

One Principal was particularly affected by the events in his school at the time of the second interview.

> You're even afraid to smile sometimes for fear that the roof's going to fall in. You know the line: "God will get you for that"? Some days I think he does. If you go out in the hall, and you joke around, someone will say, "He obviously doesn't take anything around here very seriously." My God, where has the fun gone? This used to be fun, I mean teaching used to be fun. I think that's one of the things that really got me down. Some joy has gone out of this somewhere.

French/English issues continued into the second interview time frame. One of the schools was in the process of planning for an expanded program to include French instruction. The struggles about community involvement, teacher expectations, student enrolment, and the impact of the second language program on the school organization took a great deal of one principal's time and energy.

Critical Incidents Continue

Critical incidents continued at all four schools. Three out of the four principals had more difficulty identifying events that we had earlier labelled "critical." One of the principals said, "I think when you get near Christmas and then into January, a lot of things have settled, and a lot of things have tapered

off as far as critical issues." They generally talked more about the day to day events in this interview.

> We're working on monitoring student progress and reporting student progress. We had our budget meetings and we talked about it, and a committee agreed to write some priorities. We sat down together and tried to tie it as best we could to what we're doing.
>
> The kids are always doing neat things. Some of them are doing "jerky" things. We have paint off several doors in the hallway because one of the kids went to the Head Custodian to get some stuff to clean his desk. In the process, he decided to spray it on a few doors on his way back to class. We now have clarified who is to use the cleaning spray and who isn't.
>
> We're working on some activities to increase the self esteem of the staff as well as the students.
>
> When the Consulting Services team comes in to talk about some testing they've done on kids, I'll go in and cover the teacher's class, because I feel they are the ones dealing with the situation and they should get it first hand. I can read about it or get it second hand. Our staff meetings are now held in classrooms so we can get to know each other as professionals, and share the good things that are happening in each other's classrooms.
>
> I meet every Friday afternoon with a cross age group of students from K to 6 for about half an hour. We talk about what makes our school good, what we'd like to change, what we'd like to keep, and any issue they'd like to bring up.
>
> A student was very angry with me, so he took some glue and wrote some graffiti on the outside of the windows in the cold. It took some detective work to track him down.
>
> On Monday mornings my secretary and I meet to discuss the coming week. I think that's been good. It makes her feel like she knows exactly what's going to happen.

The Third Interviews

The third interview attempted to follow up on stories begun in the first or second interview. In particular, I wanted to probe for details about incidents and situations so as to capture implications, subtleties, underlying connections between events or actions. I asked for stories to describe critical incidents, surprises, the highlight of their year, what they had learned, and what they anticipated for goals for their second year. Again categories basically reflected this agenda, but digressed to include individual uniqueness that I saw as critical to demonstrate essences about beginning principalship experiences.

All of the principals talked about a view of administrating, that involved empowering and caring for the people in their organizations, and of maintaining a personal integrity. Perhaps this in itself presented a critical incident to their staffs, as at least two of the groups had been used to the ways of a principal trained in the 50's or 60's. In the first interview, perhaps the "honeymoon" masked some of this reaction for the principals, but by the third interview, the "honeymoon" was over.

Two of the principals had dealt with situations that could have grown into messy situations involving ethics charges. Obviously the details cannot be referred to in this study. Both people were horrified that they had to witness such events, and that they had to try and untangle them. Even personal safety became a fear for one principal as a result of "tackling" this type of problem head on. At the conclusion of the data collection both of these situations were unresolved.

All four principals had serious concerns about the effectiveness or competency of at least one staff member. Very early in their first year they became embroiled in the time snatching despair of having to deal with a person in difficulty, often sacrificing other desired work, and adding to the guilt and doubts they shouldered. Three of the four began to experience paranoia about their own belief system. None of them had an assistant administrator with whom they could check perceptions or discuss matters.

Settling Into the Role of Principal

As the principals settled into their positions, I had a sense that they began to be comfortable, not to be confused with complacent, about their role. One principal commented specifically that in a lot of ways

her comfort level had increased. When I asked her what she thought the factors for this were, she replied:

> I think time has helped increase the comfort level of the staff members with me. They feel more open to make some comments. To use a really obtuse example, last week I wore an outfit to school, that I had made. A couple of the staff members commented on how much they really liked it. I said, "I wore it in the Fall." And then, their comment was, "Well we didn't know you well enough in the Fall, to comment on it." So I think, I think that, I'm willing to put money where my mouth is, so that if there's something I see as a big enough priority to me, I'll go ahead with it.

Critical Incidents Continue

Through the second and third interviews critical incidents continued, with the same frequency, the same unpredictability, but the degree of "critical" about them seemed to be much diminished. Two of the principals readily shared stories about these in the third interview, indeed they had to be selective about which ones to share.

> I had to deal with a situation where a parent was irate and was ready to go for the throat of the teacher. I had called her and said that her son had been acting up and that we needed to meet. She said, "Well I've had it with that teacher, I've absolutely had it. Before I transfer my son, I want a meeting and I will get my piece said." Well I was to be at a meeting all day, and I came specifically back to be part of the meeting with this teacher. I'm glad that I did because I'm not certain whether the teacher could have handled it with the tact that was necessary. I'm not saying that I was perfectly tactful, but I think we were able to dissipate the anger the parent was showing, and then focus on the boy. What was interesting is that the the parent and the teacher

> were sort of at loggerheads, the child was sort of sitting in the middle. I was having to intervene and sort of mediate and check. Finally, the boy pulled his chair over to my side, by my desk, away from the coffee table where the three of them had been sitting, and said, "I'm coming to sit with you 'cause this is driving me crazy." His Mum was wanting him to go to another school, but he wanted to go to this school and be with his friends. So we worked out a compromise there.

By the third interviews, "critical" seemed to be reserved for the "major" incidents that took place. In the initial interviews, I had sensed that "critical" referred generally to all those decisions that had to be made, again usually while at least one other incident was taking place. It was this "thinking on their feet" that three of the principals described as "critical." These incidents seemed to be in the majority in September, but not so by the third term. The fourth principal identified "blocking" incidents as critical.

Two of the principals had some degree of difficulty coming up with incidents to share when I asked. One principal had a great deal of difficulty recalling incidents that fitted the termed "critical" as she had in the first two interviews. Perhaps by now they were more comfortable in solving problems, they had a much clearer picture of their direction, and style, and they were adjusting to their role. Two of the principals were much more relaxed in describing

every day events. As expressed earlier, one of them described that she was much more comfortable with herself.

Was Their Year What They Thought it Would Be?

In the end, I asked each principal if their first year had been what they expected. One replied that it was not because she had "no preconceived ideas about what it was going to be like." When pressed further she said she really did not know what to expect at all, nor had she known what to expect in her former leadership position.

By the third interview, what the principals identified as "surprises" had changed. They had more difficulty identifying something that surprised them, and the content of the surprises showed an evolution of what they expected would happen. One principal said he was no longer surprised by anything that would happen. Two of the principals had a great deal of difficulty identifying surprises by the third interview. The other principal was not really surprised by anything that she had to deal with. One described it this way:

> I don't think I have gotten any surprises, I guess because I've been an Assistant Principal, and have been exposed to the sorts of things that go on. I just expect this job to be full of surprises. It's never going to be boring. There's always going to be something coming up.

Another principal said about surprises:

> I had no preconceived notions about what it would be like to be a principal so I guess I had no surprises, because I didn't know what to expect. It was so pressured and so intense. I didn't really have preconceived notions, but generally my knowledge of the principalship didn't include the pressure cooker situations that I'd be in, even though I'd been in schools for a long time.

A third commented about what surprised him:

> I think I still haven't quite realized the amount of power you have as a principal. I still feel sometimes that it's not there, then I realize I have the power to make many decisions, about virtually everything that affects my school. There is almost nothing that can overpower what we as a school decide - my boss of course, and through the chain of command, but other than that not much can interfere. I also find it a surprise that I don't have to rush into anything. I always thought I would have to.

And the fourth principal commented:

> I think it's probably because of the experiences I had before, essentially very little surprised me. I think this year was basically what I expected it to be. Of course there were some things that happened that I wish hadn't, but I don't think I would change my year very much, if at all. The lessons have been good, not all kind, but good.

The Physiological Impact of their Work

Three out of the four principals experienced some physiological impact on themselves as a result of their first year experiences. General malaise, insomnia, skin problems, and continued low grade infections, flu or cold-like symptoms, were described. At the time of the second interview, one principal talked about the

need to "heal," and about getting "signals" from his body that he was overdoing it. Two reported that they were really tired or very "down" at the time of the third interview. One said she didn't think she could ever survive another year like the one she had just experienced. Another indicated that a spouse and children were expressing concern for the work load and time spent apart from the family. One expressed it this way:

> I know my energy level is not as high as it was in the fall, but I also know I just don't feel well.

Another principal said that she had not gone anywhere during her spring holiday:

> You know, I was surprised that I was so tired at spring break. I think that it was school based. My body was showing me that I had really been working physically as well as emotionally hard. I needed that time just to get some energy back.

The Toughest Problems

I asked each of the principals what type of problems were seen by them as the "toughest to deal with." One principal categorized these as follows:

> I think I have to focus in three areas: students - their low self esteem, trying to reach them, and the way they handle day to day situations; staff - fighting passive resistance; and parents - reaching a happy medium about their concerns.

Another referred to problems with adults as the toughest, because "they always hit your gut, they hurt

the most." He then went on to say "the teachers are the hardest group." A third talked about parents or "irrational" people as the toughest to manage.

> Upset and irrational parents are the toughest to deal with. Upset parents who you can talk to and who come in and say, "I have a question or a concern" and they give you an opportunity to answer, discuss, talk about the problem or at least say "I'll get back to you about that" are one thing. If you have someone who comes in ranting and raving and roaring, it's very difficult. Those ones are always upsetting. I feel like a failure if I haven't helped them calm down and feel better. I just dread these situations and similar encounters with teachers. I dread telling someone for whatever reason that they're not doing their job. I suppose some people enjoy dealing with them. I don't. It's not good for a person's blood pressure, heart, or anything.

The fourth principal had difficulty identifying the most difficult situation, or types of situations for her to deal with. In the end she said:

> I guess I'd say some categories of tough situations would be: teacher beliefs and expectations of children, and maybe some parent beliefs as well, specifically related to their approach to discipline.

A Highlight in the First Year

I asked each of the principals to reflect on their year and discuss a highlight of their experiences. Their replies gave insight to the role clarification process they had experienced:

> You know, I don't have one highlight, at all. I really feel this has been, even though there has been the trauma in the year, it's just been so

rewarding. I just feel thrilled. Someone asked me the other day, uh, "What do you hope to be doing next year?" Well I hope it's this, for sure.

The highlight is when I walk into the kindergarten classroom and chaos breaks loose and the kids say, "Hello Mr. Teddy", and I get about fifty-eight hugs around my knees. Or when kids come down and kind of sheepishly come around the corner and they want to read you a story. Or teaching a unit to a group of kids. I guess those are sort of the good days, when you go home and you've been able to spend time with the kids.

I think a highlight for me in June of last year was to have gained the confidence of the community and my superiors, so that I would get the nod to be appointed here for the next year. I think that highlight was the fact that there was a large supportive group of teachers and parents who were just really thrilled to have me stay. That felt good. That was a highlight. Our kids were thrilled. I think it was a basic statement saying that, "this is a kid's school again." It was just gratifying to think that, some of the actions, some of the things I might have talked about or modeled, would create that.

I don't know if there's a major highlight. I think there were a lot of little minor things that happened throughout the year. One class declared principal day, so I got cards and messages and notes and things like that, which was kind of neat. I think some of the productions that have gone on after school hours have been quite successful. I think getting parental comments have felt good. Probably one of the biggest highlights that'll stick in my mind was a couple of weeks ago when my grade fours, fives and sixes went to the School District Outdoor Education Centre over night. I said that I would come down on the Monday night and do something, and it was really neat when I got there. I got there in time for supper and I got all this mass of invitations to sit with different kids at different tables. Afterwards we came back (I had taken both my keyboard and my guitar down) and we had a sing song. We had a great time. We had forty five minutes of uninterrupted music. The kids sang. It was great. The only reason we stopped was

because it was time for the kids to go to bed. As I was leaving, I got hugs and kisses, "Good-bye."

Would They Be Principals Next Year?

I asked each principal whether or not they would remain a principal. The conversation with one of them follows:

Interviewer: For the foreseeable future do you see yourself a principal?
Principal: I don't know.

Interviewer: Let me rephrase that. For this next, five years, do you see yourself being a principal?

Principal: Possibly yeah.

Interviewer: Do you like what you're doing?

Principal: I like what I'm doing. I think I do a fair to middling job at it. I don't know though, what the future holds. I know in my heart of hearts, I can't go through another year like this year. It's been emotionally devastating at times. I am one of these people that can fall asleep standing up, normally. I have never had as many nights of insomnia as I have since June tenth a year ago. I don't know how, tough I can be, how long I can fight the resistance to change. I find that I concur with one of the staff members who said, "I really wonder how much the staff is child centered." Sometimes, I think we spread ourselves too thin. I'm really not sure that I have the strategy, to accomplish effective long term change. I internalize a lot of stuff and I'm not sure if that's what I want to do. It's really hard to be positive, positive, positive all the time. And so I find that I, on occasion, let stress get the better of me. I don't know if that's what I want to do. I refer to myself as bag lady, and some days I really feel that way, and I don't like that feeling.

Interviewer: What would it take for you to not have that feeling?

> Principal: I think, to have staff that realize that there are a variety of components to the educational system, both to children learning, and also to the running of an organization. I need more of a team approach, and I'm not getting that.

Another principal replied to the same question:

> I don't really know whether I'm ready to make a judgement on that, I'm going to, because I've had my designation confirmed now. So I'm going to, but I don't know, I honestly don't know. I know I do not ever ever in my wildest dreams, want to become an associate superintendent. There are an awful awful lot of days at the end of the day when I say to myself, "I think I'd be a lot happier back in a classroom. I think I could have more fun." But that, of course, would be dependent upon the administrator I had, and the school I was in. In fact there are a lot of days when I think it might be more fun to sell used RVs. But those are the bad days. I'm sure if I was selling used RVs there'd be a lot of days that I said, "I wish I was back running a school." So, I plan on staying in it, but I hope I have the nerve or the honesty or whatever you want to call it at some point in time to say, "No I think this is counter productive to me, my health, my family," and draw back.

Reflecting on a First Year

In reflecting on his first year, one principal said:

> I think that you mature in this job pretty quickly and you realize that some things you don't have control over, or you don't have the power over. You realize quickly that you're not going to be everything for everybody. I think you realize that, but I think there always is a feeling of some regret when you're in this vulnerable position, or you're dealing with a lot of problem kind of things. Because that's your position, you don't deal with all nice things. Those things just happen on a daily basis. Some of them are just going to have to be there, and you can be supportive and you can listen, but you have to be

> able just to sort out which ones are really all that big. I think we all get our own egos involved, or we get hurt feelings if something doesn't go our way, or if somebody's upset. You want everybody to like you. I think you develop a little more of a clear picture, you become more clear in what your stances are on issues, and when you're going to really take them, and when it's time to take them instead of just, pussy footing around sometimes and being kind, you act.

What They Learned

All four principals expressed that they experienced personal growth during their first year. Three of them said that they would not wish to grow "that way" ever again, but all of them discussed openly that their first year as a principal had provided invaluable "on the job" learning experiences. Although one principal described her year as "emotionally devastating at times" she said that she learned much about dealing with people, about the frustrations of dealing with teachers who remained at a school largely because they lived nearby, and about the impact of few "doers" on a staff. She learned to "take charge" as opposed to relying on outside advice, suggesting that she had begun to assemble a repertoire of solutions for problems. Her individuality emerged in comments like the following by the time of the third interview:

> There are still issues that I think need to be dealt with as quickly as possible. For example, student concerns, especially those related to discipline matters, and staff concerns. I'm still pretty much a perfectionist when it comes to

> paper work - getting it done on time, but in a couple of incidents lately I've demanded extra time to do reports that had to be submitted to downtown, because I thought there might be a hidden agenda involved. I wanted some more time to think them through before I responded.

Three of the four principals had difficulty identifying an incident as critical by the third interview. The fourth principal essentially had difficulty with this from the beginning. She expressed a reason:

> I think maybe because of confidence or experience, identifying something as a critical incident is no different than at the start of our interviews. I think of incidents as positive as well as negative, and maybe that complicates things. I know there are going to be times when you think, "Why is this happening?" but I feel very secure, very good about what's happened.

The very fact that critical incidents were difficult to identify near the end of the first year, suggested that a collective gathering of problem solving skills had taken place. One of the principals was surprised by this discovery.

One of the principals learned to be more vigilant in his observations of situations, to "perch" on a teacher's desks at the end of the day and ask "How are things?," to rely on his instincts about dealing with problems, and to proceed slowly in addressing some problems. Another principal learned that there were a multitude of issues that took him "away from the real work" he thought he should be doing. He found dealing with people a source of frustration, that some

situations required caution and courage, and he recognized the need for long range planning for his school.

What the Principals Would Do Differently

Each of the principals talked about some things they would do differently. Two needed some time to think before they were able to reply. The others answered fairly quickly. They all talked about generalized and specific goals for themselves or for the school. One was "hoping for more positive and low key interaction, more freedom to interact with the kids."

Recommendations were made by each of the principals: "develop a support network amongst colleagues," "you really need a soul mate, be it your spouse, a friend, somebody that you can talk to in a non-judgmental situation, you need somebody that really listens," "there needs to be specific training programs for principals," or "take time for yourself."

> Sometimes it's really hard because you know you have a deadline and you have to get this done and you have to get that done, but take time to laugh, take time to appreciate life as it goes on, because you're never going to go through it again. I guess the bottom line is to know that somewhere in the administrivia of the world there is someone who is going through crisis far worse than you are and there's always someone there that will give you the support, and don't be afraid to ask for it.

Other recommendations were: find a mentor, maintain contact with colleagues, work with a good principal first, participate in a leadership enhancement course, do something special for yourself once in a while.

All of the principals wanted to remain in their position in the end, although one was not sure for how long. Three had goals in mind for the next year, and all of them had ideas about what they might do differently. These were not expressed with regret, more they were said in a context of "being too swamped" to do otherwise.

Having presented the stories about first year experiences, three themes arising out of the data are explored in the following section.

Emerging Themes

Although not all of the principals shared the same or similar experiences, there were three themes that began to emerge from the data gathered from the interviews. The first theme had to do with the sense of shock, outrage, or disappointment about some of the first year principals' experiences. These were the surprises they'd rather not have had to manage. The second theme described the overwhelming nature of the

principal's role, that of being "swamped" and isolated with work, decisions, and events. The third theme referred to those pleasant surprises, the serendipidous events they came upon, most importantly, the feeling that they were no longer a stranger in their new school. Detail about these themes follows.

I'm Shocked

"This is my job?"

All of the principals could not believe the nature of some of the tasks they had to perform. "You mean I'm supposed to do that?" came out of some of the "surprises" they encountered. They had no preconceptions that some events would occur, or how some things were accomplished in schools, especially those distasteful tasks like disciplining a teacher. In addition, not only were some events surprises, but detecting them was another source of surprise. Some events took considerable time and "sleuthing" to uncover. One principal expected to find a level of readiness in her school at school opening, but on closer inspection realized that she had missed noticing details about the poor condition of the school. Another did not know about the negative influence of

the secretary until she returned unexpectedly early to the school well into the first term.

All four principals said that they had good background experiences to prepare them for their first year, yet there still was an element of mystery about some situations, or certainly a surprise about some of the details they uncovered in facing those incidents. In varying degrees, each new principal did not know who handled certain matters, that certain matters existed, or that they would have to deal with them. This discovery ended their "honeymoon." In the harsh reality of dealing with distasteful issues, of having to direct a staff member that they thought ought to know better, they "matured" quickly.

"They did what?"

There was a feeling of incredulous disbelief about some event, or disappointment expressed by each of the principals directly or indirectly. No matter how prepared principals thought they were, when a teacher said something to a child that was hurtful, or when what seemed like the fiftieth incident had just occurred and it was not yet 9:00 in the morning, there was a reaction of "I don't believe I'm having to deal with this - and I don't think anyone else would believe it either." Each principal expressed disbelief at the

way professionals talked to them or to someone else in their school. One principal quoted that his spouse was shocked at the types of incidents he faced. That all matters could not be discussed added to feelings of frustration emerging from dealing with these dilemmas.

"I feel slapped in the face!"

Three of the principals experienced one or more events that had the effect of someone throwing cold water in their faces. They felt shocked, outraged, and betrayed by some incidents they had to handle. The incidents involving staff who appeared to be supportive but were quite damaging behind the scenes, made the principals feel as if they had been betrayed. In three of the schools, at least one staff member was manipulative, uncooperative, or malicious towards the new principal. Each of the principals had to face matters related to the Teachers' Code of Ethics. Each new principal had to discipline or move at least one staff member to summative evaluation. They expressed disgust about having to deal with these sorts of problems. These were the most difficult to substantiate in the presentation of he data because they were incidents "crossed out" by the informants when they read and approved the interview transcripts.

Nevertheless, they existed, and they influenced the "maturing" of the principals.

I'm Overwhelmed

"I'm swamped and I'm all alone to deal with this!"

To some extent each of the principals felt overwhelmed by all that they had to do, in such short time frames, with little warning, and on their own. Three of them expressed this on more than one occasion, directly and indirectly, sometimes listing it as a critical incident in itself. None was the type that would consciously avoid work; all knew that a principalship involved lots of hard work, but they still expressed a degree of surprise about the quantity of demands on them, about the short time frame for requests, and about the lack of help or support in their school to accomplish these demands.

Each principal was essentially alone, without support, and yet under constant close scrutiny. Their feelings of isolation, and at times expressed desperation about this, were palpable in interviews with three of the principals.

"Why me?"

Three of them indicated a degree of desperation throughout the interviews. From time to time throughout the interviews, I observed a degree of hopping from crisis to crisis in their descriptions of a typical day. I had a sense that these principals, in particular, experienced some difficulty in maintaining a focus on their goals in the midst of all that they had to deal with on a daily basis, often without predictability, and often with the feeling that they would not be able to please everyone involved in the decisions to be made. They were in a judgmental role where the parties involved were either unwilling or unable to compromise. There were often few options, or few solutions generated in situations such as these. The principals saw themselves as being unable to turn to someone for assistance or to help generate options. One of the most difficult adjustments to administrative work, seemed to be that of handling yet one more critical incident when there were several already piled waiting - usually on the principal's desk, or often literally at the doorway to the office.

"Why would a person want to do this type of work and am I sure I want to?"

Two of the principals expressed the concern that they could not "please everyone" as they made decisions, and went about their daily work. This contributed to their expressed feelings of doubt about themselves, and discomfort about what they were expected to do. In the midst of their fast paced days, self doubt flourished. Although they were not sufficiently disillusioned to surrender, they were troubled with the feelings surfacing from these confusing thoughts. One of the principals actually said, "I quit" more than once during the second interview. He admittedly was very angry about a situation out of his control, but that he admitted this to another indicated the extent of the inner turmoil he was experiencing.

All four principals experienced frustration in not being able to explain situations because of confidentiality despite the need to be accepted and liked.

"I'm leaving on the next bus, train, plane or boat."

All but one of the principals expressed this sentiment overtly or covertly. There was a desire - if only a fleeting one - to escape, to turn back the

clock, to "take a breather," to let someone else deal with the problems for an interlude so they could catch up with themselves, find their desk, meet a deadline, or just think for a few minutes. None of the principals were "quitters," indeed, I do not think any of them would have been happy leaving their position, but they would have liked to quit for just a few moments. There was not a sense that they wanted to leave their position, just to have a break from it - before the next critical incident found them. One of them talked about going back to the classroom or leaving to go into business. I do not think he was serious beyond that few minutes while he expressed those thoughts, but it was a tantalizing momentary dream.

Three of the four principals expressed that they were tired. Perhaps this was a type of tired that went beyond the physical sense. They were "tired" of having their word not accepted, of being an unknown and constantly challenged, and of having to explain their values, beliefs and actions to a constantly scrutinizing audience. These "assaults" on their personal and professional values were insulting, overwhelming, contributed to their feeling of isolation, and contributed negatively to their sense of "self." It came as no surprise, therefore, when they

entertained thoughts, if only momentarily, of "running away from it all."

I'm Home At Last!

From the stranger to the new school at the beginning of the first term, each of the principals experienced a sense of "coming home" by the end of their first year. They had been excluded from the culture of the new school as a newcomer. At some point in the third term they began to feel as if they were a part of the culture. They began to talk in terms of "we" versus "I". There was a greater sense of acceptance of self, and of knowing what they stood for. Seeing themselves as principals, developing for themselves their own sense of what principals do was much clearer in the way they talked about their goals, their accomplishments, and the reactions of the people in their school. As they started to become incorporated into the culture of the school, to be known and accepted, there was a sense of coming home, of something in themselves coming to fruition.

"I feel thrilled!"

In the middle of all of the stresses and pressures, the ambiguities, and the personal struggles

of "coming in from the cold", there was a series of happy surprises. When a teacher expressed pleasure at something the new principal did, when a difficult parent expressed support, when a troubled student demonstrated positive change, there was indescribable joy. One principal's eyes filled with tears when she described how a particularly "tough" teacher praised her in front of a parent. All of the principals were able to discuss a highlight of their year. For many it was recalled with a sense of "this feels great!". They were no longer the stranger of the first days, but an accepted member of a "family."

"This work is exhilarating!"

Throughout the interviews, perhaps more so in the second and third sessions, as they spoke about their schools, their students, their staff, their parents, and even their problems, a feeling of enjoyment, and perhaps pride in their work, and their accomplishments shone in their faces. It was almost like a parent talking about a new child. They expressed joy about some accomplishment even in the midst of all the critical incidents. One principal spoke particularly lovingly about her school. It was almost as if the long labour had indeed produced a treasured offspring. Two of the principals wavered when asked if they would

continue in their position. They indicated they would remain principals, because too much of themselves had gone into their school to acquiesce in giving it to someone else.

The sense of pride that showed in the glow of their faces as they talked about a special event, a cherished encounter, a clever solution to a difficult problem, an accomplishment by someone in **their** school, demonstrated that they had "come home", that they were no longer the stranger at the door who was challenging others to trust them.

Summary

This chapter attempted to capture what it means to be a beginning principal. Through the use of stories from the three interviews, I have described what four principals expected, what happened to them, what they did not expect to happen, and what they learned.

In the first interview, I learned that they had goals for themselves and their schools, that they experienced surprises, that they had to deal with incidents that we labelled "critical," and that their "typical days" were not unlike those described in the literature. In some ways they were in shock, unable to believe that they would have to perform certain tasks,

or that people would act towards them as they did. In other ways, they maintained an optimistic excitement about their first year.

In the second interview, I learned that their goals had been amended to accommodate changing circumstances, that the principals continued to experience surprises, that critical incidents flourished, and that typical days continued to demonstrate the fast paced one-on-one interactions expressed in the literature. They were overwhelmed by their work, or by what was expected of them, and physically tired as a result.

In the third interview, they were expressing goals about the second school year, surprises were not surprising any longer, and critical incidents were more difficult to identify. Typical days were long, fast paced and left little time for reflection. The principals began to report that they were pleased about their work, that they liked what they were doing, and that they were proud of some of their accomplishments. They began to describe a repertoire of administrative strategies.

I regret that fewer stories were used than might have been. I attempted to use stories from interviews that would be as complete as possible so as to provide an understanding or a context for events in a beginning

principalship. In some cases I was able to refer to situations or incidents, but I was unable to full describe them because of the delicate nature of those events, the possibility of breaching confidentiality, anonymity or ethics, or the request of the individual principal that I not include a particular story in the study.

Further comments about the data follow in the reflections, conclusions and recommendations presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of the purpose, method and major findings of the study, reflections from the literature and my own thoughts, as well as implications for practice and research.

Summary of the Study

The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine carefully the events in a first year of a principalship to discover what it means to be a first year principal. In particular, there was a focus on the impact of critical incidents on principals' actions, decision making, and on the process of clarifying their role, as well as a focus on identifying the relationship between what principals expected would happen and what really did occur. The study attempted to describe the uniqueness of a first year in a principalship, and to capture the positive as well as not so positive events that took place. It was intended to reveal incidents

in the first year of a principalship such that individuals would be able to recognize themselves and take comfort that they were not alone. The study was intended to be a consciousness raising for the individuals, by providing opportunity for reflection and critical self examination. By "telling the stories" about four first year principals, through their words, interpretations, and contexts, and with their emphasis on the important aspects, I hoped to provide insight into the nature of administrative work for other beginning principals as well as to help prospective principals decide if school administration might be the work for them. It was hoped that the study would document information, and gather "wisdoms" about a first year in a principalship that had previously not been addressed and perhaps provide a catharsis for participants and readers.

Above all the purpose of this study was to provide help and assistance to other beginning school administrators in a "user friendly" way. I wanted to capture information so that it would take the reader into the beginning principal's life. I also wanted to describe the "stories" of first year principals so well that the description would reawaken experiences to a level of greater understanding on the part of the participants and then later the readers. "Thick

description" attempted to recreate situations such that others would see themselves. For some of the participants, the recording of these descriptions, or the telling and the publishing of their "stories," was a crucial link to the cleansing opportunities that the study provided. In the process of "telling their stories," perhaps some stress was relieved, some guilt was banished or reduced, and some thought clarification allowed an enabling instead of disabling action to occur.

The Methodology

In order to gather stories about first year experiences I selected four first year elementary principals who brought a variety of background experiences, and histories to their position. A pilot study was conducted to rehearse my interviewing, transcribing and data analysis skills. Once the study had been explained to the informants, and they gave their consent to be included in it, I proceeded to interview each of the four first year principals over the course of their first year.

The interviews were semi-structured. Although a number of similar questions were asked of each principal, generally the interviews followed the lead of the informants' conversation. I encouraged talk

about goals, critical incidents, typical day events, and surprises encountered. In subsequent interviews, I asked about the progress of goals, previously shared critical incidents or events, new critical incidents, typical day events, and surprises. In order to encourage critical analysis and reflection on the part of the principal, I took the role of asking questions to first establish topics, followed by asking questions to probe for more detail or to clarify information shared. The order of questions, the direction of each interview, and the responses to questions differed from individual to individual.

Ethics issues were repeated at each interview and were recorded at the time of the third interview. Principals were assured that their identity, and the identity of their school and school staff, would be kept confidential. Each principal received the transcript of each interview to verify the data before it was incorporated into the study. Once the fourth chapter was drafted, a copy was sent to the principals in order for them to be able to verify their input.

Data were gathered from the transcripts of the taped interviews, from my notes and log about observations, from my ongoing conversations with the four principals, and from notes and memories about my own first year as a principal. Data were analyzed on

the basis of the major questions asked at the start of the study. Categories were developed from my notations on master transcripts of interviews. From the process of recording "stories," from re-readings of the transcripts, and from discussions with colleagues and my advisor, themes emerged.

Throughout the process of the study, care was taken not to generalize, or summarize, but to capture the unique individuality of the beginning principals' experiences. To keep my own perspective clear, I maintained a close link with my advisor, sharing transcripts, interview agendas, and emerging categories and themes. Credibility was maintained throughout by peer review, member checks, triangulation and the keeping of an audit trail.

Major Findings

The study turned out to be a revelation about a first year in school administration more than a gathering of definitive "answers" to the questions asked in Chapter 1. The beginnings of some "answers" did surface for each of the major questions that formed the "agenda" for this study nevertheless.

The first question asked about principals' expectations. All four principals knew they would be dealing with issues, with people, with resolving

conflict at various levels, and that they would be busy each day, but I got a sense from their responses to questions, and from their "stories" that they saw their day to day life in a very generalized sense until it "hit them in the face." It was the details, the unexpected incidents, the combinations of complicated factors in their organization, that they did not expect. These shaped how the administrators developed, this impacted on their feelings of success or failure, and it helped determine whether or not they would remain in administrative work. I expected that the study would reveal the nature of administrative work as highly individual, that experiences were a "teacher," and that first experiences were unique, at times traumatic and hence could have a lingering impact on the individuals. This was demonstrated in the work of the four first year principals.

The second question had to do with what they expected to accomplish. All of the principals had goals for their year. As the year progressed these were amended to accommodate conditions present. All of them were reasonable goals for the situations I observed, even though they may not have been achieved in the first year.

The third question searched for what really happened to the first year principals. I found that

the beginning principals' work was characterized by fast paced interruptions, interactions with individuals, and a multiplicity, complexity and ambiguity that was dizzying. They encountered surprises, disappointments, betrayals, and they felt exhaustion, physically and perhaps mentally about some of their work. In addition, they expressed a feeling of loneliness and isolation throughout the year. There were so many events, issues and concerns that they could not disclose or discuss at the school level, as a result, they often were unable to explain their actions. All of them expressed overtly or covertly that being a principal was not always "fun."

Question four asked about critical incidents. My investigation revealed that there were critical incidents in each school. These incidents had little predictability about them in large part, and they were seemingly unceasing in quantity at the beginning of the first term. Those who conveyed a sense of already knowing clearly what they believed in, and who reflected these beliefs and values in their daily routine of prioritizing, seemed to consider fewer incidents as "critical." By the last term critical incidents were occurring less frequently, or fewer incidents were classified as critical by the principals. Dealing with these "critical" incidents

caused the principals to clarify what was expected of them (by themselves as well as others), but did not impact on originally stated goals as much as I had expected.

All of the principals had to deal with teachers who were treating or managing students in a way that they found hard to accept. At the end of the first interviews, they were just starting to deal with the many hours that must go into helping those situations. All of the principals gained experience in their first year in dealing with professional ethics or facing the issues in teacher competency.

Question five probed into the differences between expectation and reality. There were gaps between expectation and reality, just as there would have been in any new experience. The study did reveal something of the nature of the gap, and perhaps to a degree, how and why the gap occurred. There was not so much a clear answer to this question, as there was a demonstration of the unexpected by all four principals in the expressions of surprise or disappointment about some events. In addition, identification of critical incidents changed from the first to the third interview. Even the experienced principals I encountered in the process of doing the pilot study, in the study itself, in sharing my research findings with

colleagues or mentors, and in my own experiences, expressed surprise about some findings in their current assignments. These veteran principals were able to recall vivid memories about at least one event from their first year. All four principals spoke directly about the value of these types of "on the job" experiences as a teacher about their new role.

Question six and seven asked about surprises and unexpected events. Without exception, the principals indicated that they had encountered what they termed "surprises" in their first year. Although some of these surprises were happy ones, the majority were disappointments. The wide range of these surprises gives further support to the significance of the "character building" that takes place through the experiences in the first year of a principalship. The study revealed the nature of the unexpected situations for beginning principals. These ranged on a continuum of mild disappointment or pleasure, to feelings of assault and betrayal, or exquisite joy.

Question eight and nine asked what they learned and what they would recommend to others. At the risk of "putting words in their mouths" I think the first year principals learned much about themselves. They learned what their "bottom line" was in dealing with critical incidents. They learned about personal inner

strength that they had not previously acknowledged in themselves. They learned to set reasonable expectations for themselves as a means to surviving their day to day work. They began to see the value of matching what they said they believed in with what they did. They learned to juggle the timing of some events in their day to accomplish tasks like paperwork or work that required reflection. They learned to read the signs their bodies were telling them about their limitations. They learned the fine art of observing and pausing before blurting out a decision, as well as to say "I don't know but I'll find out" or "Can I think about it and I'll get back to you?" about some issues. They began to gather a repertoire of "solutions" for some problems. They developed an appreciation for the complexities and ambiguities people in schools can put before the principal. At the end of their first year, in their words, they were "no longer surprised by surprises."

They made recommendations for others. They suggested the need for closing the office door (figuratively or literally) for even a few minutes each day to reflect, read, reprioritize or catch their breath about events around them. In addition they saw that forming a relationship with a mentor or a colleague and being able to talk with them regularly

was crucial. They advised others to be realistic about what happens to a first year principal. They advised beginners to expect that not everyone will agree with the principal, and that some critical incidents will be difficult and not pleasant to deal with. New principals ought to expect to be interrupted, to put in long hours, to experience an increase in stress levels and to make compensations to reduce both. They suggested finding a "bottom line" about issues. Above all else, "To thine own self be true" seemed to be their advice for others.

Reflections

About the Literature

The literature may give great comfort to an experienced principal, but I am not sure this comfort gets through to a beginning principal. Even though information is explicit, I think the literature does not prepare a first year principal for this experience. I think it gives greater comfort to experienced principals because they have a concrete recollection to "ground" the "theory" of someone else, and because they recognize perhaps more clearly that administrative

situations are often unique to individuals and their situations.

The literature certainly makes the role of a principal clear, admittedly from varying perspectives, but nevertheless, what is expected of a school administrator is well documented. The skills and concepts that are required to be in place are equally well described over a long period of time and by many distinguished authors. Some descriptive studies offer insight into the everyday events in a principalship. A limited number of first year experiences are even chronicled for perusal. Despite all of this, enough of an element of the unknown exists about what will take place, that it's only through the on the job experiences that the reading and studying makes sense and has meaning.

In reflecting on the literature, there were some contributions that clarified for me the experiences of beginning principals. Sergiovanni (1989) said that what was needed in administration was a restoration of the word "minister," that principals needed to minister to the needs of the people in their organization. This promotion and protection of the values of the school (or perhaps those of the new principal) was revealed in the handling of the critical incidents by the beginning principals. He also talked about "leadership by

outrage." There were some examples of this method of solving a problem in the work of the four principals, especially as they wrestled with their integrity and dealt with what they termed the most difficult problems. His covenant notion about schools was particularly observable in the work of one of the principals. This person "enabled" the people in her organization. Or was it Hodgkinson's (1978) values approach that best enabled the beginning principal? Clearly Sergiovanni's (1987) "reflective principal" offered insight as to how to support beginners.

Essentially what Wolcott (1973) and Greenfield (1983, 1985, 1986) have said about the nature of administrative work, remained true for beginning principals in this study. Montgomerie, McIntosh, and Mattson's (1987) research about the role of a principal was demonstrated in that the roles observed in this study were essentially a "new image" not an "old shadow." Daresh's findings about the feeling of being "swamped" and about beginning principals having to see themselves in that role were also confirmed.

If there was any difference in their day to day role, it was in their processes, in the way they solved problems, in their prioritizing of situations, and in their adjusting to their position of power rather than in the content of their experiences, in the intensity

of the situations, or perhaps in the limits on the methods of addressing critical incidents available to them.

The literature offered some insights into a first year experience that would probably mean much more after a first year rather than before or during it. Descriptive studies were conducted and were available for reading by the principals, but the teaching in these would likely have had less impact on their actions than did the first experiences they encountered. Much literature talked about the nature of administrative work in a school. Even with this as background to training programs, there will always be lack of information about the "real" work of a principal until we personalize training programs to meet the needs of individuals, and bring the training approach "on site."

I think we ought to look to Sergiovanni, Greenfield and Hodgkinson for advice. Perhaps in focusing on the covenants, ministering, values, social dimensions and values of our new principals, and in the process of reflective practice, we would achieve excellence in schools. If we actually teach the business of administering, professionalize it, allow for reflection about it, perhaps this would occur in our lifetime.

Personal Reflections

At the end of an investigation about what happens to first year principals, memories of the beginning of my own first year were again quite vivid. At the "seven year itch" stage of my own career as an educator, I found myself catapulted into administration. At the time I wondered if I'd been appointed because I had been experiencing a growing sense of frustration, regarding what I had perceived to be the lack of ability of administration to "fix" what I thought were the inadequacies of the education system. I was saddened by what I saw as indifference and perhaps some borderline competency in some of my colleagues. It seemed as if the system lacked an ability, desire, or opportunity to do anything real about it. I remember thinking at the time of my first appointment to a principalship that at least now I could "do something." I quickly realized however, that I did not know what or how to "do it." I was shocked to discover that very little about what happens in a classroom, prepares a principal for the "baptism" sure to occur in the first hours/days/weeks of a first assignment. In addition, I found very little information available to describe what principals actually did. In 1978 Harry Wolcott's The Man In the

Principal's Office was one of the few ethnographic descriptors available. I absorbed its information, but still felt a great deal of discomfort as I approached my first principalship in the summer of 1978.

I remember spending the majority of the summer previous to this first year, reading, writing, thinking, talking, listening about my new assignment. Having gleaned the essence of my first school through files and the impressions of a minority of personnel available in the summer, by the end of August I was quite anxious about what lay ahead. I knew that the school was ready for the new year in that the class lists were prepared, the schedules in place, the floors were shiny, the handbook information was together, the materials were in place, some staff were working to prepare classrooms. But the feeling that there was a giant unknown persisted. I made an appointment to see the Superintendent. She had the graciousness not to laugh when I described our level of readiness and then I asked: "What will I be doing each day? What can I expect to happen?" I recall her describing in general terms the nature of administrative work that somehow did not ease my rising panic. In truth, all I do recall her saying is that I would "walk around each day." The "baptism" soon was upon me. My "honeymoon" was over in about two hours. It was at that point that

the physical education teacher raised a magazine in front of his face and kept it there for the duration of the inaugural staff meeting. The rest of that first year seemed to melt into a flurry and a mosaic of joys, frustrations, "gut wrenching" incidents, tears and new experiences some of which are still vividly emblazoned in my memory. What follows are my reflections about all of those memories and of this study in an attempt to bring closure to both.

After my own experiences my theory was that what I expected, differed from what really happened, and therefore my first year was a surprise and a shocking experience in many ways. To varying degrees, I think the four principals in the study discovered some of that as well. In the process of reconciling the gap between what they expected and what a principalship was really like, each principal acclimatized to their role, and gained a repertoire of "solutions." For those for whom the first year had been a baptism by water, they may have confirmed strengths and skills largely already in place. For those who had been baptized by fire, their role clarification will likely continue.

I think there will always be "surprises" in school administration. I think those surprises will appear, because of the uniqueness of individual administrators matched up with individual situations. There are so

few predictabilities about principalships, that even veteran principals experience these surprises in new assignments. They cannot possibly predict all that will occur, and no matter how well they think they might be prepared for an assignment, each one is unique, and presents new challenges. Essentially each new principal in a new assignment whether a first year or not seems therefore to be a beginning principal.

At present, many principals are not trained or prepared for administrative work in schools. Whatever the variety of preparation methods in place now, perhaps because of the characteristics of these approaches, they often fall short when it comes to "bracing" principals for the reality of their job. As a result, I think some of the principals in the study felt violated, and perhaps betrayed by some aspect of their work. All four of them had ideals about their job. All four were working hard for their schools. None of the informants had an easy task before them. Their schools presented challenge in different ways. I did not observe any sense of a "power trip" as the driving force for their work. They were trying to provide the best possible education for the people in their care. All the principals saw themselves as well liked, competent, creative, innovative educators. That was why they were promoted. What was it then that had

betrayed them? Suddenly, these new principals were asked to make decisions without a background of experiences or data to be competent and correct **all** the time, with people they wanted to accept them. They had their values and beliefs challenged by traditions, actions, reactions of teachers and parents, by the way things were supposed to be and by the way things had always been. How many were conscious of the emotional impact of change on others - that they represented by their very presence? Most were assailed by the unwillingness of others to trust their judgement, to agree, to acquiesce without arguments and sniping. The blow to the personal values and to the developing sense of self was perhaps the hardest to take. In the end, the principal who expressed that he was working with a difficult staff was perhaps the least satisfied, while the principal who chose to see the "good" and build on that was perhaps the most satisfied at the end of her first year.

As I look back from the time of the first telephone contact with four principals at the start of their first year as a school administrator, I realized that a lot had happened to these principals, and that a first year truly is a unique experience. It was unique in the sense that it was an individual development. It was not unique in that it basically resembled what

research tells us administrative life is all about. Perhaps the uniqueness emerged more in degree than anything else. Rather "ordinary" incidents seemed to take place at each of the schools. These incidents were largely predictable in a generalized sense (issues with people, conflict, and so on), but they had far greater impact on the actions and emotions of the beginner than they may have had on a veteran principal. I have no doubt that other principals occasionally feel the urge to go into sales, or to pass a decision for someone else to make, but that absolutely abandoned and swamped feeling is not perhaps so prolonged for experienced administrators. The isolation of the first year principal was much more painful for them than it appears to be for veteran principals. There was almost a sense of panic from time to time because they were the place where "the buck stopped".

I made observations about the principals that were not specifically an answer to any question. I think all four of the principals grew as their first year "zipped" by. Although they did not really say they had, I observed them to be more comfortable with themselves, more willing to decide on their own, more willing to do what had to do rather than "pussyfoot" or "do the kindest thing" as one principal put it. I think they clarified for themselves what their

convictions were, and they began to exercise those convictions more quickly and efficiently. They were courageous in dealing with tough issues and more willing to follow their instincts about dilemmas as the year progressed. They were anxious about their year - less so near its completion. Part of this was due to the structure of the District procedures where first year principals were not confirmed in their principal designation until the end of the first year in the position. The pressure of the confirmation of designation was a reality for three out of the four principals. In all cases, the Associate Superintendent and the principal took steps to seek feedback in a formal way from the staff, students, and community about the principals' effectiveness. Once data were gathered, a recommendation to confirm (or not to confirm) the principal in their position was to be sent to the board. At the time of the last interview, all four were expected to be confirmed, but the decision had not been made public.

It seemed that a sense of urgency existed for three out of the four principals. By the end of the third interview, and hence after the confirmation of designation process had been undertaken, I sensed that they did not feel as compelled to solve something, answer something, respond to an event, decide, or react

as quickly. I observed the principals taking steps to empower their staff by involving the group in decision making. I saw them deal with people in a low key, gentle, and caring manner (versus an authoritarian way).

There were so many differences in the content of stories and critical incide ts shared, that I saw each of the principals involved in an individual construction of their own administrative role. All worked very hard and put in long hours at school. They had high ideals about what they wanted to accomplish as a principal. All had a greater understanding of what was expected of them by the end of their first year. I saw the four principals act as teachers as they incorporated their beliefs in their new school. What they thought was acceptable and what they wanted to have happen on a daily basis, began to be expressed in their thoughts, words and actions to people and situations in their organization.

By the end of the third interview, there was an observable transition for three of the principals. Surprises were fewer, critical incidents were more difficult for them to identify as separate from the day to day routines, and a typical day had undergone a metamorphosis for each individual. One principal was essentially already used to her title, her role, saw

the positives in it, rejoiced in the daily events and took on the issues she could not live with, with conviction. She knew where she was "heading." The other three were well on their way to this "arrival." They had begun to see themselves as principals, and wanted to remain so in the coming year.

Although I did not doubt that all four would survive their first year as a principal, the stress in their job had been palpable at times. In the third this was reduced somewhat, almost as if it no longer mattered what others thought, only what **they** thought. Doing the "right thing" was more important.

One of the principals said that she could "never again survive a year" like the one that she had just experienced. Another said that the experience of being a first year principal was a character building one. A third said that the fun had gone out of it. A fourth said that she had "gone to heaven in her school." Here was insight into the joy, the trauma and the unique individualism in assuming the role of a first year principal.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Practice

In the process of beginning to document the complexities of what it means to be a first year principal, several implications about current practices in school administration have surfaced. The results of this study speak to needs for the education (preservice) programs, professional development activities (inservice programs), and mentor systems (coaching and feedback) in school districts. What happens to candidates in their education programs, in their work in other leadership positions, and in their ongoing personal professional development and support activities, are probably better predictors of success than the current interview, written assignment, and resume searching techniques. One Alberta school district is instituting formalized teaching programs for first year leadership staff. If we believe in the approach of teacher effectiveness programs according to Gordon (1974), the next step is to move consultants and mentors into the first year principal's schools and to provide coaching and feedback, and opportunity for reflection that will allow for self analysis and continued growth and development.

One principal in the study had a less traumatic year than the other three. This principal had more direct contact with the work of a principal, a stronger personal self concept and sense of values, a support system in place, and a more varied leadership background. There is perhaps a moral in this "story" for other first year principals, for school district selection committees, and for potential leadership candidates.

The principals in this study demonstrated or talked about three stages of "getting ready" for a principalship that a new principal ought to consider. Some preparation takes place well in advance of a first year, some just before assuming the role (but after the actual assignment has been made), and more preparation during a first year as a principal. Principals in this study who encountered less shock about their role, and more ease about assimilating into it, had a variety of experiences, had worked in other leadership roles, and had been exposed to leaders whom they respected. Upon learning about their first appointment, they had tried to learn as much as possible about their new assignment. Focusing on the people, their names, the culture of the school and community, and the current direction or goals as a first priority seemed to insulate principals from some of the surprises in a

first year experience. In addition, clarifying a personal philosophy, or belief system about administration assisted in day to day decision making.

If the work of a principal is an individual process and a construction, then there must be a greater understanding of individuals, a better "handle" on their individual philosophy, strengths, skills, beliefs, background experiences, biases, and a greater congruence in matching the individual capabilities with the needs of an organization and the people in it. There must also be consideration given to providing more latitude for this individualism to flourish in training and support programs for principals.

As I conducted this study, one of the questions asked in the informal preamble to interviews, and then in the last interview, had to do with the interview and discussion process, and whether or not it allowed them to reflect, have time to critically examine issues, and as a result take a proactive versus reactive stance, or clarify a situation while it was occurring rather than after it was over. All of the principals said the process helped them in these ways. Again the implication exists for school districts. Rather than appoint first year principals and set them "adrift," consideration ought to be given to providing a support

mechanism to parallel the reflection process of this study that could be in place throughout a first year.

Time and availability of "help" seemed to be an issue for the beginning principals in this study. Often when they needed advice or assistance, it was not available. When the advice became available the principal was off "putting out another set of bush fires." An endless game of "telephone tag" added to the frustration of one of the principal's days. A district ought to consider a resource for first year principals available on a daily and a consultative versus evaluative basis. It seems to me that a district who believes in the power of the potential of its newly appointed people must ensure their continued growth and development through some type of mentor or support system.

Related to this implication, just as we spend more time with beginning mothers, beginning teachers, and so on, there is a need for access to superiors, to a support process that is readily available after the initial preparation programs or professional development sessions end in August or September. I use the analogy of a new mother at home with her babe just after **her** mother has returned to her out of province home. Just as the new mother panics and says "what do I do now?" so also does the new principal. Admittedly

they all survive - somehow - but wouldn't it be easier on the people involved if there was a formalized mechanism for support during that vulnerable first term?

The nature of the school, its community, its culture, the level of expertise and the characteristics of the staff and student body, the nature of the relationship between the outgoing administrator and the staff, students and community, the confidence level, the leadership style of the outgoing principal, and the perceived and real skills and experience of the new administrator, all seemed to be factors out of the new principal's control, yet perhaps a significant predictor of success. Some of the assignments given to the first year principals in this study would have provided significant challenges for even seasoned veteran principals. Perhaps school districts ought to give consideration to providing new appointees with a "starter school" or a "starter " situation with an experienced assistant principal, to reduce the amount of "first year shock." Consideration ought to be given to matching the new principal with the situation they enter so that it becomes as much a set up for success as possible. In particular, I wonder if the leadership style and amount of love a school and community has for an outgoing principal are not significant factors in

determining success. Where a previous principal was appreciated, perhaps the leadership style of the new principal ought to be similar, and where the community and school are ready for a change, a different style of administration would be appropriate.

The literature supports the view that some of the needs of the first year principals were mechanical and procedural - how do I do a budget document, who do I phone about the leaking roof, what procedure do I follow in moving to summative evaluation about a teacher? School districts ought to give consideration to providing this information at the beginning of the first year, as well as throughout as questions arise. What would be the impact on the role clarification process if this were available? Implications for research follow.

Implications for Further Research

Because of the limits of this study, there are implications for further research to expand the data available about what happens to first year principals. This study was conducted in urban elementary schools in one school district. What differences would be observed if those characteristics were altered: a different district, beginning principals in junior or senior high schools, in smaller community or rural

settings, or in a centralized decision making school district?

Critical incidents were not analyzed as much as they were captured and exposed. An investigation into the nature of critical incidents may provide insights not gathered in this study.

It was clear that the four principals in this study had a variety of backgrounds and preparation processes in place. What would be the impact of training programs aimed at meeting the needs of individuals, and what types of training programs could be developed to achieve less gap between expectation and reality?

All four principals in this study administered small to medium sized elementary schools of varying age and community. What is the impact of the type of setting the new principal inherits? What about the impact of the type of leadership role that the new principal replaces? Does this hold true for experienced principals in a new school as well as new principals in a new school? Are there differences if a principal comes to their position through the "traditional route" of assistant principal or coordinator in a school rather than from other leadership positions? Was there a lingering effect of

first year experiences on the way principals problem solved in subsequent situations?

The first year principals were all assigned to schools without an assistant principal, counsellor, or curriculum coordinator. This presented some additional challenges to their work load. In addition they had no one to take into their confidence on staff, no one with whom they could discuss issues or simply unwind. Would the stress on them have been reduced if they had been assigned instead to a moderately sized school with some measure of administrative support system already in place?

The nature of the school, the community and the staff seemed to be significant factors in all of the first year principals' lives. One of these situations was a particularly tough one for even a seasoned veteran. None of the assignments could have been seen to be an "easy" one. If a district believes in their first year people, are there ways that they might ensure that the inaugural principal experiences are as positive and supportive as possible? Are there factors such as size of school, "track record" of the school, an administrative team in place, nature of the community that could be aligned as "starter school" characteristics? A further study might consider the impact of the type of organization on the individual.

One of the principals indicated that it would have been easier for her to answer some of my questions that caused her to have to reflect about the existing school year, well into the next year. Another study might consider following a group of first principals through their first years, rather than merely their first year.

A training program of some sort that was driven by the needs of the individuals seemed to be in order to assist first year principals. What would be the impact of using effective teaching practice philosophies involving coaching and feedback in working on site with fellow principals (whether beginning or experienced)? What would be the impact of concentrating such efforts with assistant principals, coordinators, department heads, or any other leadership hopefuls in a school district? Coupled with this, what would be the impact of formalizing a structure to allow for reflection as part of administrative work?

Also seen as important was an opportunity to establish connections with peers and mentors. What would be the impact of this type of program on first year as well as experienced principals? What would be the impact of a mentor approach for aspiring leadership candidates?

Conclusion

Essentially, no matter how effective one may be as a classroom teacher, there is an element of "mystique" about what happens in the daily life as an administrator in a school. We may be the one of the **most** effective teachers on a staff, indeed may already possess many administrative skills, but we still have little idea about what a principal actually does, about what happens inside the "office" walls and about the subtleties as to how leaders manoeuvre throughout their day. Hence when we find ourselves in that role (not always by design), we are surprised, shocked, disappointed, trapped, by some or many events. I was unable to draw a generalization as to why some first year principals were quite shocked (and continuously so) by events, while others only sporadically so, even though each principal in the study was surprised about something. I think the explanation for this "surprise," and hence for the gap between expectation and reality, is in Sergiovanni's statement, that administration is ministering, and that it is essentially a "construction." If this is true, then the work of school administrators is a very personal and individual business. Only through experience and reflection therefore, can principals develop for

themselves their own administrative style, their own way of prioritizing and handling situations, and their own daily routine.

I learned much from this study. I learned essentially that I was not alone in the experiences I had. Through my meetings with other principals, experienced and otherwise, I realized that my experiences were not that unusual and that I need no longer apologize for my naivete as a first year principal. This study reinforced my feelings about the importance of integrity, about the strength of the congruence between action and philosophy, and in the value of clarifying a "bottom line" before accepting a leadership role. Despite having to deal with some issues and situations that all of us would rather avoid, there is much about being a principal that I enjoy. These aspects were confirmed in watching others go about their work.

It became obvious to me that those who survive a first year, as did the four principals in the study, need some sort of special recognition or rite of passage. There needs to be some sort of acknowledgement for the mammoth effort, and the significant parts of their "soul" that have been paid out. I remember standing at the back door of my first school with my assistant principal at the end of the

last day of school. The entire staff and student body had left. There were three cars in the parking lot - mine, the head caretaker's and the assistant's. I thought "Is this all there is? Shouldn't the mine whistle be blowing, or firecrackers be going off or something significant be taking place?" The anti climax was insight into the tremendous effort, the stress, the personal payment, but most importantly, the significant personal growth that had gone into the start of my own role clarification process as a principal.

Having described some of the stories about what happened to four first year principals, and the themes arising out of the data, four observations come to mind to bring the study to closure.

First, I anticipated a gap between what the principals expected to happen, and what did take place. It was too simple to conclude merely that a gap existed. This would suggest that the principals were deficient in some way, or that a simple solution would have been to better prepare them for their principalship. I do not think this is an answer. As with all new experiences there was a difference between expectation and what took place. For a variety of reasons this was also so for the beginning principals in the study. The situation itself was difficult to

accept, there was a lack of technical or political knowledge, there was a lack of experiential alternatives or there was a lack of expertise or knowledge to generate these. It was the nature of the gap (unexpected events), the reasons for it, and the total individuality about it that were a surprise to me. Each principal expressed surprise at some incident or event or they found themselves ill-prepared to deal with some situation.

Second, the first year events had a significant impact on the individual principals. There was no doubt that there was such an impact on all four principals. They ranged on a continuum of the most affected by their first year (the one who had not applied), to the least affected (the one who had previously held a variety of administrative positions).

Third, throughout the data gathering process, the principals' individuality remained predominant. The way all the principals clarified for themselves their role, the way they reconciled themselves to the fact that "the buck really stops here" and "I have to stand alone" differed greatly. Each of the first year experiences impacted on them in significant but varied ways. Each of them dealt with similar issues in different ways, or they faced different issues altogether. In addition they viewed their work in

different ways as exampled by the fact that one of the principals indicated a need to "heal and energize," while another expressed delight about the nature of her experiences.

Fourth, all four principals experienced personal growth. Three of them said they would not wish to grow "that way" ever again, but all of them discussed openly what they had learned. In addition they described their first year as a valuable "on the job" learning experiences.

Finally, what principals expected would happen, and what really happened, differed. Sometimes the differences were small, other times quite significant. Perhaps where the differences were smaller, those principals were "baptized" with water, but where there was a large gap between expectation and reality, there was a "baptism of fire." As the principals melded their own experiences with the events they dealt with in their first school, Sergiovanni's "construction" took place. At the time of the data gathering, no amount of preparation (in the form of courses, readings, study), seemed able to replace this "construction."

The words of one of the respondents seemed the most appropriate to bring closure to a study about first year principals:

I think you have to remember this about being a first year principal - every year you have to be a new teacher. If you're not, then you're not learning and you're not excited about your job. You're a new teacher with experience, but it's important to see that newness in yourself. I think if I stay an administrator until I retire, I'll have experience and back up because of that experience, but it will still be new. I'll still be teaching and learning. When I feel as if it's no longer new and inviting, it will be time to leave.

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